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RUNNER-UP

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WILL ONLINE DETECTIVES CRACK THE CASE?

ANGOLA PRISON'S
CONTROVERSIAL INMATE RODEO

CHRISTINA APPLEGATE
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FOOTBALL FORECAST
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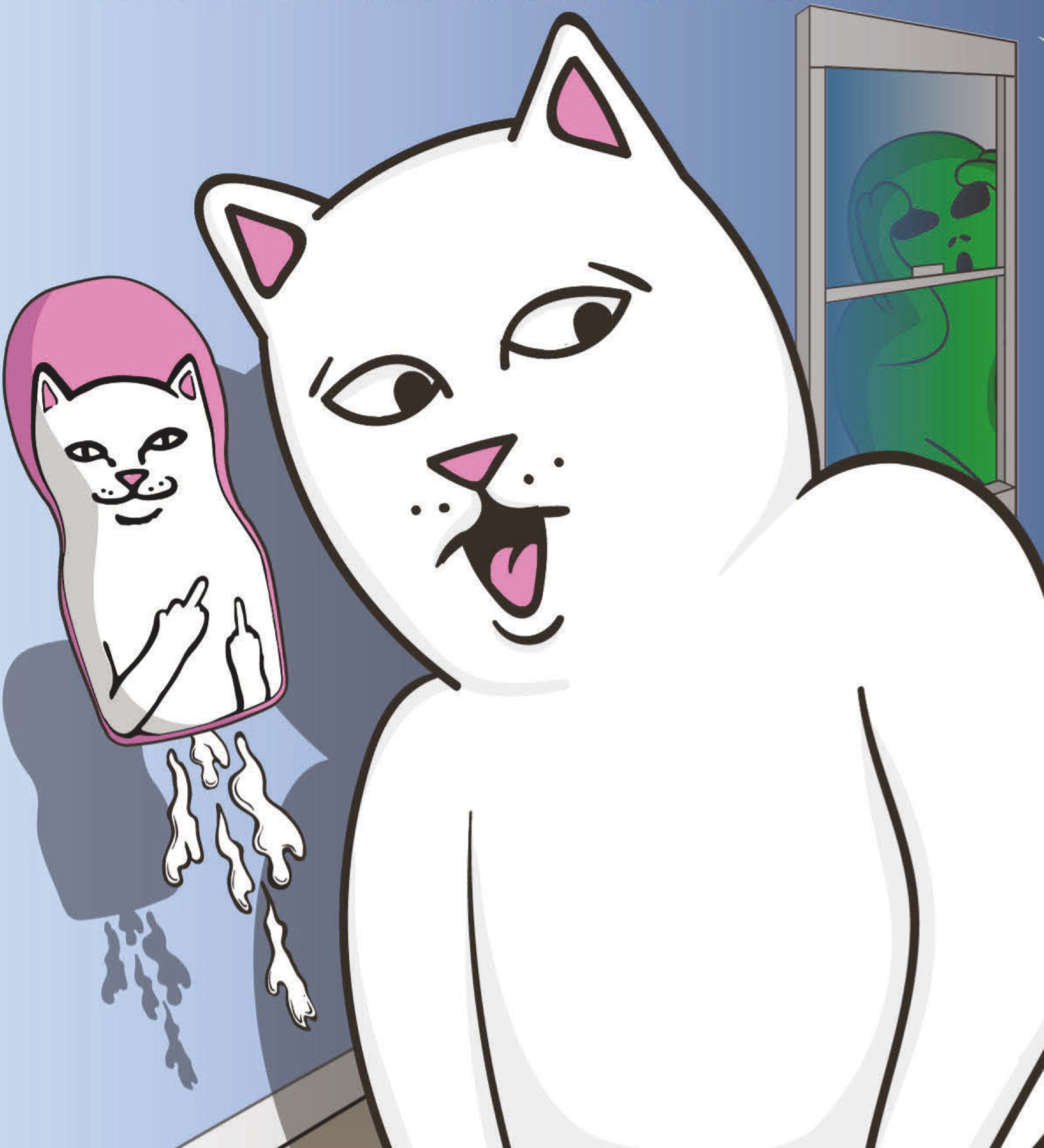

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CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
Angela Derasmo

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Mish Barber-Way

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Matt Westphalen

MANAGING EDITOR
Sarah Walker

FEATURES EDITOR
Phil Hanrahan

COPY EDITOR
Pat Tomlinson

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Crispin Boyer, Shane Cashman,
Matt Gallagher, Elle Hardy, Paul James,
John Lingan, Jenny Nordbak,
Sam Phillips, Barbara Pizio

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Victor Gonzalez, Mike Hallquist

FEATURED ARTISTS
Todd Francis, Porous Walker

IMAGE SPECIALISTS
Zack Korn, Christine Bishop

CONTRIBUTORS
Ms. Sands, Holly Randall, Littlefair Photography,
Earl Miller, Stan Malinowski, John David,
Ryan Calderon, Gerald de Behr, JT Photography,
Jay Mourad, Frank McMains

PRINT PRODUCTION COORDINATOR
Victor Gonzalez

NEWSSTAND CONSULTANTS
Willett Associates - Philip & John Willett

CUSTOMER SERVICE
Palm Coast Data
PO Box 420525
Palm Coast, FL 32142
penthouse@emailcustomerservice.com
800-289-7368

EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING OFFICE
8944 Mason Avenue
Chatsworth, CA 91311
310-280-1900

ENTERTAINMENT/ LICENSING OFFICE
8944 Mason Avenue
Chatsworth, CA 91311
310-280-1900
licensing@penthouse.com

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FROM THE EDITORS

FOR those who like football, less humidity, and Halloween, autumn rules. Oh, and there's the Fall Classic, too—the World Series, won last year by the Boston Red Sox (disappointing a few Dodgers fans in our building). Autumn 2019 marks a *Penthouse* milestone. Fifty years ago this September, Bob Guccione brought his magazine to America, having launched his operation in London during the Swinging Sixties.

What better way to kick off the celebration than bring you an issue full of beautiful women, fascinating feature stories, and a football preview with an NFL insider? Australian-born journalist Elle Hardy takes us inside the controversial inmate rodeo at Louisiana's Angola Prison, while Shane Cashman plunges into the world of "desktop detectives," amateur sleuths trying to solve the mystery of the Long Island Serial Killer.

"Bad Moon Rising"—that spooky classic by Creedence Clearwater Revival—hit the radio airwaves just a few months before our founder set up shop in New York, and we have a Creedence expert, John Lingan, to tell us the story of the song on its 50th birthday.

Fan of Christina Applegate? She's got a hit Netflix series, *Dead to Me,* and she's our Crush. She's joined by Naomi Swann, our September Pet of the Month, and Liv Wild, our October Pet of the Month—stunners, both. Equally ravishing is England's Ella Silver, our Penthouse Pet of the Year Runner-Up, a goddess who reminds us how sexy sweater weather can be.

Just in time for Halloween, we explore the history of horror movies through a lens of black directors and actors (*Get Out,* anyone?). And wait until you see our gallery of images capturing kinky seekers of pleasure and pain during the past three centuries.

Enjoy the issue's harvest and see you next time!

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SEPTEMBER 2019 PET
NAOMI SWANN

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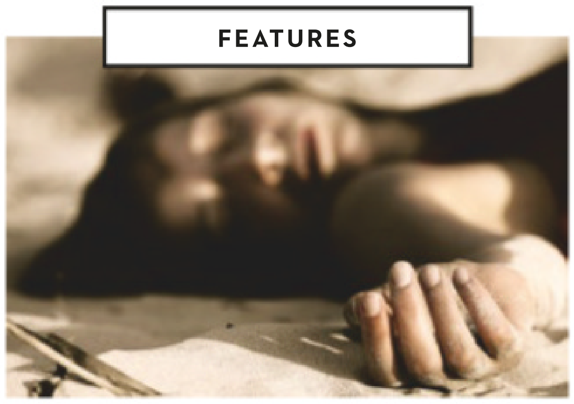

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

The Inner SANCTUM

I am an actress in the adult industry, which means I have sex for a living. Best job in the world! Sexually, I've tried it all—threesomes, foursomes, gangbangs, cream pies, interracial, anal—and nothing fazes me. It's all in a day's work. But I was so blown away by what happened the other night that I had to share my story with Penthouse.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I'd just arrived in Los Angeles for work and was staying with a girlfriend. She's also an adult actress, and she told me about an exclusive sex party she was invited to later that night at a private club. She had performed there in the past but was attending as a guest this time.

I'd heard stories about these black-tie masquerade events and pool parties before; they are world-renowned in wealthy and porn circles, and are thrown in different cities and countries, in rented private mansions, and on entire floors in high-end hotels.

The clientele at these soirees are very elite, and membership can cost up to a million dollars. The way it works is, if you're a female, either you have to be referred by a member, or you have to submit an extensive application with photos to be approved to attend. If you're a male nonmember, you have to pay thousands of dollars for a single entry. Normally I'd be prescreened for admission, but since I'm a known porn star I have a good résumé and was permitted to accompany my friend that night.

All the men are required to wear a tuxedo and bow tie, and all the women are expected to wear evening gowns or lingerie. There's a coat (and dress) check at the door, and masks are mandatory upon entry, but are optional once inside. Remember Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*? This party was just like that movie, but on Viagra.

We arrived at the hotel where the event was happening and went to the bar for a pre-game drink. I was wearing a black silk dress with matching bra and panties, and patent leather fuck-me pumps. I'm tall with shoulder-length blonde hair, 34C breasts, and I work out several times a week with a trainer so I have a firm ass, a flat stomach, and long shapely legs. My girlfriend is a popular Latina porn actress with huge natural tits, cocoa brown skin, and curves in all the right places. She wore an elegant black sequin gown with a slit all the way up the side, and stiletto heels.

We ordered champagne from the bartender since we were told that was all they were serving at the party. Then at 11 o'clock, my friend and I headed up to the penthouse floor.

When the elevator doors opened, we were greeted by a security guard who immediately took our phones. Photography of any kind is strictly prohibited at these events, and grounds for immediate ejection if you're caught filming anything.

These parties are billed as a safe environment for sexual exploration, and the elaborate masks the guests wear guarantee their anonymity. Though I took mine off the minute we cleared the guards, because, quite honestly, I wanted everyone to see me.

And despite the disguises, I was still able to recognize some of the famous people who were there. People who, for obvious reasons, I will not name here.

After checking our outer attire, my friend and I walked down the long hall into a wide-open suite with a skyline view of the city and a massive sunken living room filled with people. This was where the party was just getting started.

We grabbed two flutes of champagne from the bar and wandered around the room, talking to some of the people standing off to the side, watching the various erotic pairings in action. There were 20 or so couples in varying states of undress standing and sitting around the room.

My girlfriend and I settled down next to a couple who, like us, were intently watching the main attraction: In the middle of the room stood a muscular man of medium height who was leaning against a large wooden table, wearing nothing but a bull's head mask with horns. He was getting sucked off by three statuesque women in white lace masks.

While this scenario was unfolding, the man in a tux next to us began to slowly massage his partner's pussy through her red satin panties, wedging his knee between her legs to widen her stance. She gasped, and started audibly moaning as he began rubbing her crotch more quickly.

Wrapping his other hand around her neck, the man drew his partner's head gently back onto his shoulder and whispered something in her ear. She parted her legs even wider, and let her body weight collapse against his chest as he started thrusting his fingers deep inside her wetness.

> *The man in the bull's head mask was now fucking one of the girls from behind while the other two were making out on the rug next to them.*

I heard the crack of a whip and I returned my attention to the foursome at the center of the room. The man in the bull's head mask was now fucking one of the girls from behind while the other two were making out on the rug next to them. The man had a small whip in his hand, which he was wielding on the ass bent underneath him.

In a thick accent he asked, "You like that, beautiful?" I didn't realize he was staring at me when he said that; then I looked up and caught his gaze. That's when I recognized the man behind the horns. His name was Jacques, and he and I had had sex before, on camera.

You see, all the performers involved in these erotic theater displays are cast from the adult industry and are paid to play privately for the members' pleasure. The men are considered party studs and are available beyond the staged sex shows to fulfill the guests' erotic requests; the women who attend are for both viewing and physical pleasure. Consent is the golden rule, however, so you must always ask for permission before you touch someone.

While he was in the middle of fucking his female partner from behind, the man in the bull's head mask extended his hand toward me and said to the room, "Why don't you join us, Charlotte?" I forgot, I wasn't wearing a mask and I'm recognizable.

My pussy was so wet by this point I decided to let Jacques take me right there in front of everyone. I was even more turned

on by the fact that it was completely impromptu. The three girls fell off into a pile of pussy-eating while I walked over to him and got down on all fours.

Jacques pulled my panties down over my ass, then my knees, and left them around my feet. Kneeling behind me, he gripped my hips, sliding his hands up the sides of my body, and then down my spine, which arched my back and pushed my ass higher in the air for him.

Parting my cheeks, he reached down between my legs and cupped my swollen and slick pussy lips. He tapped them a few times and then gave my ass cheek a wet slap. I turned my head and quietly implored Jacques to stick his thick, uncut dick in my throbbing cunt.

Jacques grabbed his shaft by the base and squeezed. Rolling back the foreskin with his other hand, he pushed the head of his cock past my labia, pulled it out, and then pushed it back in again, giving an extra thrust as he fully entered my tight pussy.

He started fucking me with long, slow strokes while my cunt clenched tightly around his cock. Jacques picked up the pace, thrusting his full weight into me. My breasts swayed with every plunge. You could hear the slapping of his balls against my taint as he fucked me hard and fast.

Jacques held my ass cheeks apart, exposing my asshole, and then slipped his thumb into the gape. Fuck man, that felt good. I could feel his cock hitting my G spot, so I started wildly bucking against him as his thumb slid deeper into my ass.

He was tag-teaming both my holes when my slit started quivering and a warm liquid sensation trickled down my leg. I realized I was starting to squirt on his cock and couldn't stop. He fucked my pussy harder as my juices sprayed out from the sides. When he pulled out to come on my asshole, I erupted like a hose, and one long stream gushed out of me, accidently drenching the girls next to us. We all laughed—shit happens!

Flipping onto my back, I lay on the floor for a minute, completely spent. After I caught my breath, Jacques helped me to my feet. As I gathered my undergarments, I looked around the suite and could see that all eyes were on me. Some people even started clapping. What a rush, knowing that I came so hard and turned on all those people at the same time.

Just then a man in a tuxedo approached me and whispered a password in my ear. Apparently there was a whole other VIP floor downstairs, with three bedrooms filled with people fucking. The secret password gained me entry into this inner sanctum.

Once I cleaned up, my friend and I grabbed another glass of champagne and headed downstairs for more hot, illicit action.

–Charlotte X., New York, New York

Seeing is believing. When you've had the encounter you've been hoping for, let us know about it! Send your letters to: *Penthouse* magazine, 8944 Mason Avenue, Chatsworth, CA 91311, or email us at letters@penthouse.com.

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SEX ASSIST FROM A FISH

JUST WHEN YOU THINK you've seen it all, along comes a human vagina crafted from fish skin.

A 35-year-old Brazilian transgender woman known only as "Maju" underwent surgery to remove her penis and install a vagina 20 years ago.

"I was the fourth person in Brazil in 1999 to have, what was then, experimental surgery," Maju recalls. "But ten years ago I developed vaginal stenosis. The opening of my vagina started to get narrower and shorter and the canal collapsed."

To enlarge her ever-shrinking vag and give Maju a chance at a "proper" sex life, doctors fashioned a tube-shaped acrylic mold and wrapped it in the skin of a tilapia (which they assured everyone is odor-free), because fish skin has stimulatory cell-growth properties, contains collagen, and has an elasticity that mimics human skin.

Says a physician who worked on Maju's case: "We were able to create a vagina of physiological length, both in thickness and by enlarging it, and the patient has recovered extremely well. She is walking around with ease, has no pain, and is urinating normally. In a couple months we believe she will be able to have sexual intercourse."

We can't help but wonder, though—what about all those rough scales?

BEARDS-N-TOILETS

SOME PEOPLE THINK beards make men more attractive. Others think you should never grow a beard unless you were born chinless, or half of your face was blown off by a shotgun. Beards go in and out of fashion, too—from 1700 to around 1830, men preferred the clean-shaven look, but by the late 1800s, most men wore beards that made them look like biblical patriarchs.

But as early as the 1660s, when British historian Thomas Fuller referred to them as "that ornamental excrement under the chin," people have been alleging that beards are unsanitary.

In 2015, a New Mexico microbiologist made headlines by swabbing a mere "handful" of local men's beards and declaring that some of them contained more germs than a toilet. Granted, he didn't swab any clean-shaven men nor any women (bearded or not), but the media couldn't resist running with headlines featuring potty-humor puns that no doubt unnerved beard-stroking Brooklyn hipsters and the women who love them.

A February 2019 study published in *European Radiology* studied 18 bearded men and 30 dogs, only to find that 23 of the dogs had fur registering high microbial counts, whereas every last one of the guys' beards rated high in microbes, as measured by their scale. According to these researchers, "dogs can be considered as 'clean' compared with bearded men."

Good news for pooches and toilets, not so much for gents sporting Moses-style facial hair.

THE NOOKIE-FREE LIFESTYLE

MOST PEOPLE would consider having no sex drive to be both a medical issue and a personal problem. But not those in the asexual community.

You heard right. There's a group of people who not only embrace the fact that they have no sex drive, they proudly proclaim it and network with similarly non-horny types to build self-esteem and a sense of togetherness.

Moreover, many asexuals want to have their absence of sex drive acknowledged as a distinct sexual orientation. They've established organizations like the Asexual Visibility and Education Network and celebrate Asexual Awareness Week in late October. We're not sure what kind of festivities are involved, but we're pretty sure it doesn't feature vibrators, latex, or butt plugs.

Asexuals even have their own jargon: They refer to themselves as "ace" (short for "asexual"), classify non-asexuals (aka normal people) "allosexuals," call people who kinda-sorta have a sex drive "graysexual," and refer to a platonic romantic crush as a "squish."

We're not here to judge. Whatever turns you on—sorry, whatever fails to turn you on—is fine with us.

CHECKUPS FOR THE WIN

AS THE JOKE GOES, men die years before women do because they want to. But the truth is that men tend to neglect their health more than women do, and thus die younger in every age group.

Though you may feel invincible in your twenties, as you start to age and begin feeling those little aches and pains, you're cheating yourself and anyone who cares about you if you neglect to take care of your body.

There's no shame in going to the doctor—at least not nearly as much shame as being hooked up to a dialysis machine for the rest of your life because you failed to get annual blood tests done.

After age 35, you should monitor your cholesterol levels, especially if you've smoked or are overweight. You should also check your blood pressure and be routinely screened for diabetes, hepatitis C, and HIV. And if you're feeling low, your life depends on being checked for clinical depression.

After age 50, be sure to get screened for colon and prostate cancer. As anyone who's had a health scare will testify, the best revenge isn't living well—it's merely staying alive.

HOW TO DRINK WITHOUT KILLING YOURSELF

ALTHOUGH THOSE SPOILSPORTS at the British medical journal *The Lancet* published an article last year claiming it's unhealthy to drink any amount of alcohol, we'll pretend we didn't hear that.

By now you should be familiar with the negative effects of alcohol abuse. Each year, there are about 88,000 deaths due to drunk driving, brain damage, liver failure, heart disease, and several forms of cancer.

But if you can't live your life without drinking and don't have a death wish, there are a few things you need to know.

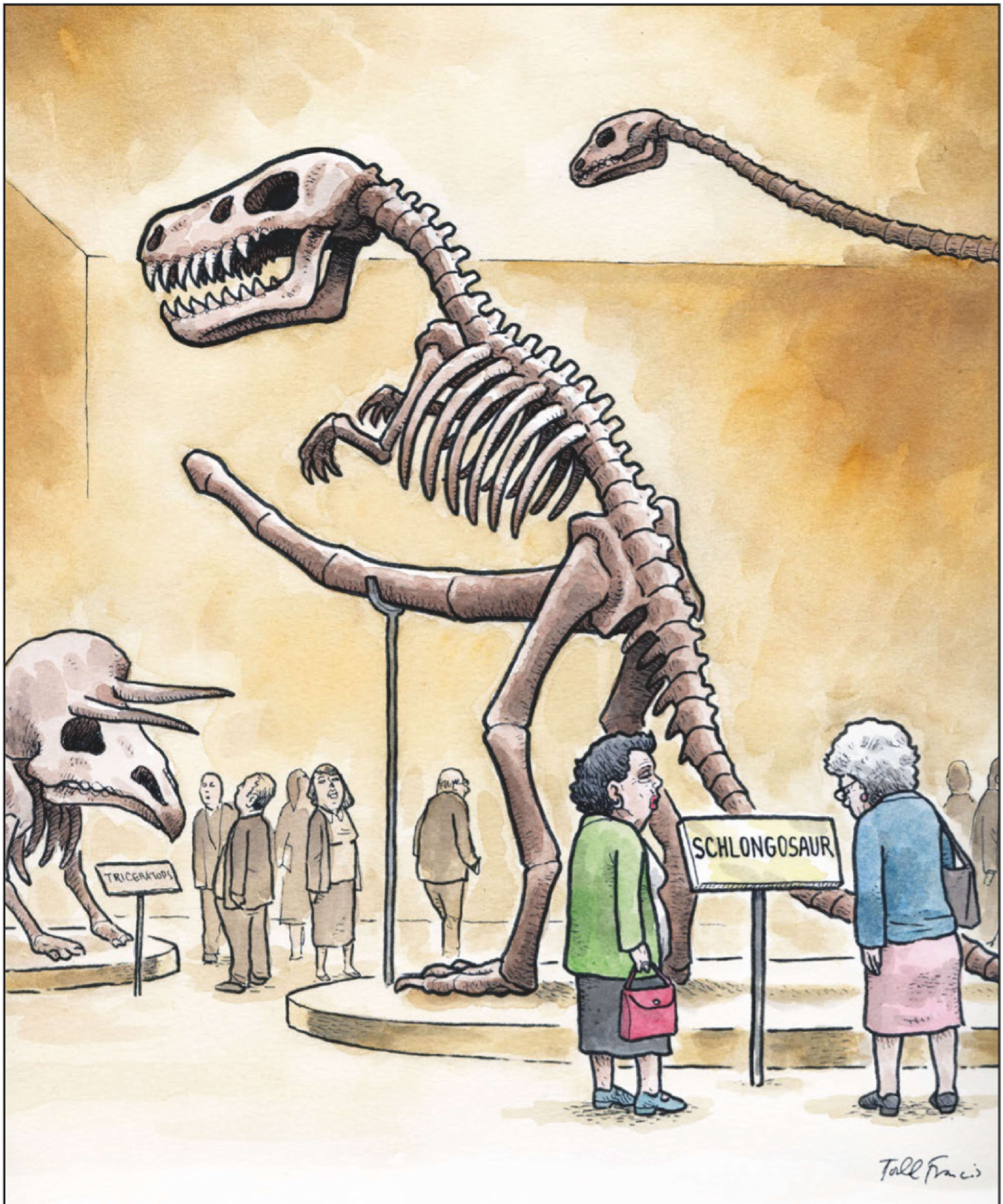
Low or moderate alcohol consumption is actually linked to certain health benefits. It can raise "good" cholesterol, lower blood pressure, decrease your risk of blood clots and diabetes, and even reduce anxiety, if only for a little while. Although high in calories, red wine is rich in antioxidants and has more health benefits than any other kind of alcoholic beverage.

If you're worried about your waistline, don't indulge in sugary drinks. And skip the beer and wine in favor of straight shots of booze, or mixed with seltzer and ice.

"Moderate" drinking is defined as no more than two standard drinks daily for men and one for women. But if you're exercising, eating right, sleeping enough, and doing what you can to limit stress, we suspect slipping in a third drink here and there won't spell your doom. Check with the French on that, who enjoy their wine. Or the Germans, who love their beer.

Oh, and don't forget to hydrate.

PHOTOS: ENRIQUE ARNAIZ LAFUENTE; MILLENIUS; WRIGHT STUDIO; STOCKCREATIONS / SHUTTERSTOCK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Todd Francis

"I don't understand this one."

EPIC UNDERWEAR

MANY MEN GIVE no thought to what type of underwear they buy, just as they neglect skin care, body odor, dancing, and the art of pleasing a woman.

This results in hundreds of thousands of males—make that millions—content buying a six-pack of tighty-whities at Costco for $10. But unless you're somehow able to yank down your pants *and* underwear in one quick swipe, your lady friend will see your skivvies and she will judge you for it—harshly.

The following may sound like an urban legend, but we heard through a friend that one woman actually kicked a man out of bed merely for committing the crime of wearing white briefs. Don't let this happen to you, because you may never recover from it emotionally.

Luckily, several high-end underwear companies have stepped in to save men from this kind of trauma with fashionable undies that combine space-age materials, world-class design, and moisture-wicking fabric to save your balls from getting too salty.

Sporting-goods company Oakley produces heat-resistant underwear that is worn by NASCAR drivers. Calvin Klein, Mack Weldon, and others have also jumped into the market.

Our favorite brand, though, is produced by the Tommy John company, which was founded by a married couple in 2008 and has grown so ginormous that they've sold four million pairs of underwear and counting.

These "Undies of the Gods" are made of "exclusive, non-pilling micro modal fabric that's sourced from beechwood trees." Many of their designs boast a "contour pouch" that enhances your junk so splendidly you might as well be wearing a codpiece. Our favorites feature a tasteful red lobster pattern over a dark-blue background.

But the best part is you can don your Tommy Johns a thousand times and they'll show absolutely no wear and tear. It's like you'd need a semiautomatic gun to kill these things—if that's your idea of a good time.

THE WISDOM OF SPERM-FREEZING

WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG and spreading your seed as wantonly as a tomcat sprays pee on a set of drapes, you may not care about procreation. But as you grow older, you may realize that men, too, have a biological clock, and you might find yourself hoping to become a father before it's too late.

But how late is too late? Well, men have been known to sire children all the way into their eighties (Nobel Prize-winning novelist Saul Bellow was 84 when he knocked up his 41-year-old wife in 1999), but once you reach the age of 35, the risk of fathering a child with autism, psychiatric disorders, and childhood cancer begins to escalate.

As you age, testosterone levels and sperm counts drop, as does the quality and motility of your sperm. According to Dr. Gloria Bachmann at Rutgers' Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, "Just as people lose muscle strength, flexibility, and endurance with age, in men, sperm also tend to lose 'fitness' over the life cycle."

Therefore, even if you're not planning on having kids now, get on over to a sperm bank, jerk yourself to completion, and leave your first deposit, just in case.

Depending on the sperm bank in question, it can cost as little as $250 or up to $1,300 for the initial analysis and one year of storage. You'll likely have to pay for additional years of storage, but sperm can be stored for up to 20 years—which means those lil' frozen tadpoles will still carry baby-making ability well into the future.

The PENTHOUSE Club™ EVENTS

AT SAN FRANCISCO'S PENTHOUSE CLUB, VIRTUAL REALITY IS NOW REALITY

GAMERS CAN NOW strap on a virtual-reality headset and visit the Penthouse Club & Restaurant VR Club, featuring the Bay Area's world-famous venue, where lap dances from today's sexiest Key Girls are available 24/7.

Thanks to a collaboration with VR adult-gaming pioneers Jimmy Hess and Daniel Dilallo, co-founders of VRClubz, Penthouse SF VR Club will allow players to enjoy experiences beyond the average VR porn, with advanced technology that gives "guests" access to a legendary club known for its sophisticated style and gorgeous women.

Best of all, with the release of the Oculus Quest, the first all-in-one gaming system for VR (no wires, no PC, just a headset and controllers), fans can experience the premier immersive online-VR adult entertainment available.

"Before the Quest, gamers used a headset that required a computer or laptop to be connected," Hess explains. "The Quest, combined with the technology we've implemented to recreate the Penthouse Club, gives guests the full-scale ability to 'walk inside' and truly experience the best in VR adult gaming."

The Oculus Quest is not only an exceptional all-in-one gaming system, it's also one of the most affordable headsets, and offers outstanding quality.

This exciting release follows the popular 2017 debut of the Gold Club SF VR, the world's first VR gentlemen's club. Penthouse SF VR Club is expected to go live this fall.

Virtual reality is an excellent way to welcome gamers who have never been to a gentlemen's club. From the comfort of their living rooms, players can get comfortable with the club experience, and discover the pleasures of fulfilling their fantasies with sexy, beautiful dancers.

"We wanted to bring the Penthouse Club to people everywhere, and let everyone enjoy the world-famous entertainment and atmosphere from anywhere in the world, any time, year-round," says Hess. "This is as close to being in the Penthouse Club as we can make it."

For more details, go to **vrclubz.com** and **penthousesf.com**

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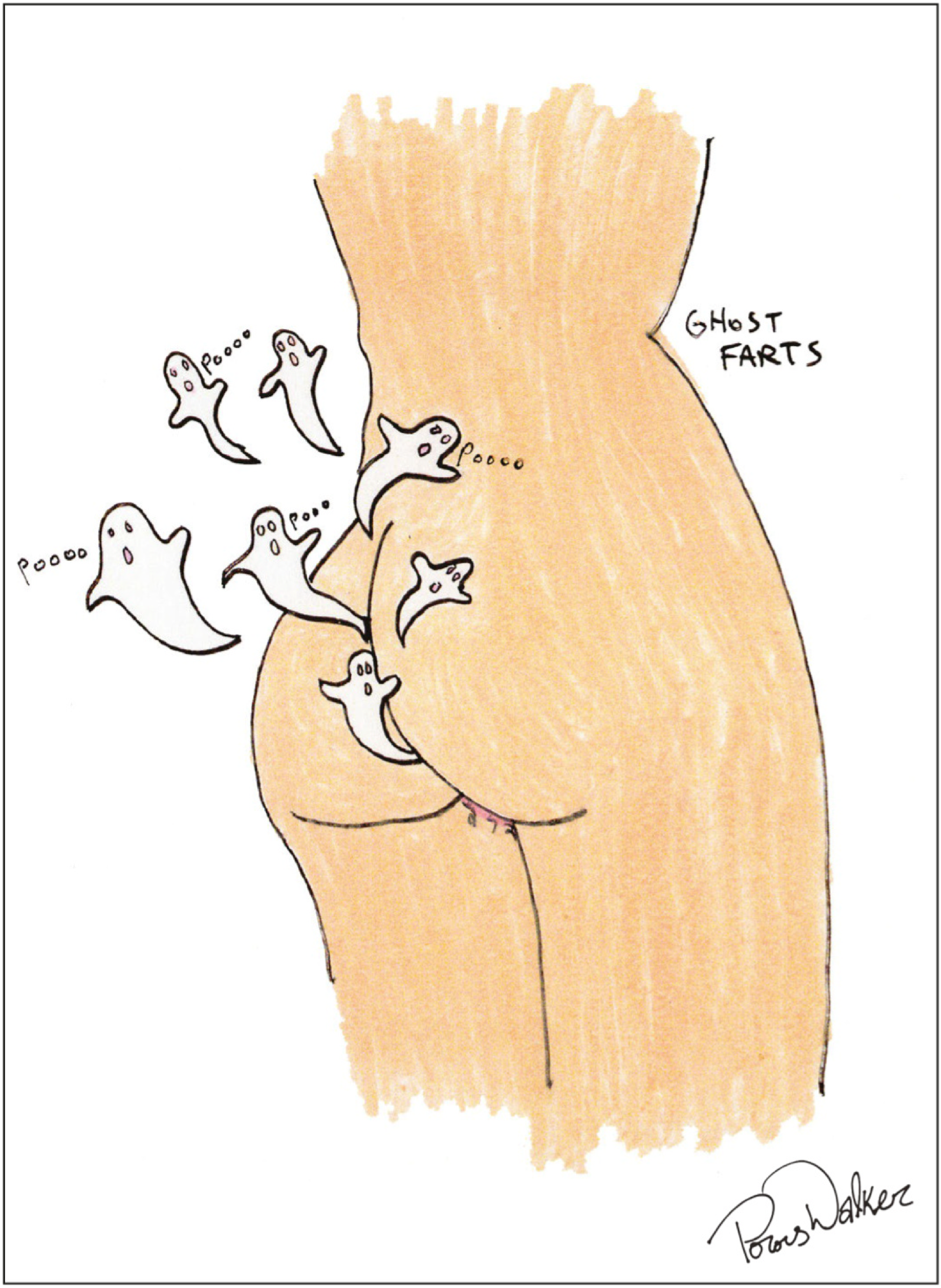
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BAD MOON RISING

A Creedence Clearwater Revival classic turns 50.

BY JOHN LINGAN

WHEN director John Landis and his music team needed a song to score two minutes of screen time just before their film's protagonist, American backpacker David Kessler, grows a pelt of black body hair, deadly fangs, and vicious claws, they turned to "Bad Moon Rising," a 1969 Creedence Clearwater Revival song written by John Fogerty.

The movie? *An American Werewolf in London,* a now-canonical 1981 horror-comedy that makes darkly humorous use of popular songs throughout. Van Morrison's "Moondance" scores a sex scene, and versions of "Blue Moon," sung by Bobby Vinton and Sam Cooke, appear, too. But the CCR song is a high point, ushering in the famous werewolf transformation scene, and Landis would later say "Bad Moon Rising," with its ominous lyrics joining a sprightly tempo and catchy riffs, fit the "mood" of his hybrid movie.

As it happens, a spooky Hollywood film was central to Fogerty's inspiration. If the song's name came from a little book of scribbled title ideas he'd been keeping since 1967, it was a movie released in 1941, a few weeks before Pearl Harbor, that got Fogerty going lyrically. Eventually called *The Devil and Daniel Webster,* the film was based on a short story of the same name by Stephen Vincent Benét, and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1936, during the depths of the Depression.

In Benét's story, a New Hampshire farmer named Jabez Stone sells his soul to the devil for cash to overcome his debts, then enjoys a stratospheric rise to local power before the Dark Lord arrives to collect and Webster has to intervene and defend the farmer at trial.

"[His] crops were the envy of the neighbourhood," Benét writes of Stone's rising fortunes, "and lightning might strike all over the valley, but it wouldn't strike his barn." In the movie, we see dark, distant clouds, followed by destroyed fields. "But not my wheat!" shouts James Craig, who plays Stone. "I'll have a rich harvest!"

John Fogerty saw the movie on TV when he was young. Born in 1945, Fogerty and his bandmates in Creedence Clearwater Revival were classic suburban California kids, raised in El Cerrito, on the east side of San Francisco Bay, during the early days of television. In the late sixties, after ten years hustling the band through various names and styles, they finally had the attention of radio listeners.

The singles "Suzie Q" and "Proud Mary" had sold well, and Fogerty was becoming more productive as a writer. He composed songs in near-silence while his wife and young children slept at night. In that unlikely laboratory—quiet and domestic, even while the greater American culture resembled a powder keg, with both Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy assassinated just months earlier—Fogerty remembered the old black-and-white movie and start putting words to chords and a melody.

In 1993, speaking to *Rolling Stone,* he highlighted a post-storm sequence in the movie: "Everybody's crops [are] destroyed. Boom. Right next door is the guy's field who made the deal with the devil, and his corn is still straight up, six feet. That image was in my mind. I went, 'Holy mackerel!'"

And so, taking inspiration from a subdued, 15-second scene in a 1941 movie, John Fogerty wrote some of the most nightmarish lyrics to ever appear in a Top 40 radio hit: *"I hear hurricanes a-blowing/ I know the end is coming soon/ I fear rivers overflowing/ I hear the voice of rage and ruin."*

It may not be the archetypal Creedence song, this tune which climbed to No. 2 in America and topped the U.K. charts. "Fortunate Son" is truer to their sound and energy, "Down on the Corner" is easier to dance to, and no riff, by anyone, has ever bettered "Up Around the Bend."

Nevertheless, "Bad Moon Rising" embodies everything that made Creedence great. It has its own marvelous intro hook, soon supplemented by the band's perennially underappreciated rhythm section: Doug "Cosmo" Clifford on drums, Stu Cook on bass, and Tom Fogerty, John's older brother and the group's painfully deposed onetime frontman, on rhythm guitar. It's also a vintage John Fogerty production, an audio tribute to Sun Records' slap-back stomp. Despite its dark lyrics, it's just so fun.

"An American Werewolf in London"

"BAD MOON RISING" HAS AMASSED NUMEROUS CULTURAL REFERENCE POINTS OVER THE YEARS, IN PART BECAUSE IT EMERGED FROM SO MANY REFERENCES ITSELF.

Fogerty never wrote love songs, and contrary to Creedence's ubiquity in Vietnam-era-set movies, he didn't regularly channel his songwriting gifts into political-protest anthems or social-minded songs, either. "Bad Moon Rising," like "Up Around the Bend," "Run Through the Jungle," and so many others, is mostly a litany of images, a summoning of a mood. In this case, the mood is literally apocalyptic, even though the tune and beat are as bouncy as the band ever got.

Perhaps that bounce helps account for the song's strikingly durable legacy, even by Creedence standards.

It's been covered by 20-plus artists, in multiple musical styles, including reggae. It's appeared in two dozen films and TV shows, from *Blade* to *The Big Lebowski,* from *Mr. Woodcock* to *Kong: Skull Island,* from *The Walking Dead* to *Alvin and the Chipmunks.* In Argentina, it's used as a stadium soccer chant. And it's the subject of the most famous misheard-lyric joke this side of "Purple Haze." People frequently interpret the chorus's closing line, "There's a bad moon on the rise," as "There's a bathroom on the right." Fogerty occasionally lightens up his own song by singing that blooper lyric in concert.

Then there's Sonic Youth, a defiantly un-Creedence-like postpunk noise band who took much harsher stands on social issues and specific politicians, including Ronald Reagan, when they first emerged from the early-1980s New York underground. Their second album, released in 1985, is their angriest and darkest, almost devoid of melody, and filled with impressionistic lyrics about Native American genocide. The record's title? *Bad Moon Rising.*

(CCR trivia: They were the first band to mention "Ol' Ronnie," as they called him, in a rock song. He's in verse three of "It Came Out of the Sky," from *Willy and the Poor Boys,* released in 1969.)

"Bad Moon Rising" still floats amiably through our culture, enriching road trips, cover bands' setlists, and classic-rock radio programming. It has amassed numerous cultural reference points over the years, in part because it emerged from so many references itself. A river of storytelling, stretching from Goethe's *Faust* to the *Saturday Evening Post* to Hollywood, flowed through "Bad Moon Rising" before Creedence ever recorded it, following days working the song out in Doug Clifford's back-garden shed.

Since 1969, it's picked up the Coen brothers, Manhattan art rock, jokebook mentions, horror movies, and so much more. Let's assume it will continue to echo, inspire, and create cultural linkages, growing like Jabez Stone's corn, reference-wise. After all, in "Bad Moon Rising," the storm never arrives.

John Lingan is the author of "Homeplace: A Southern Town, a Country Legend, and the Last Days of a Mountaintop Honky-Tonk." He lives in Maryland with his wife and two children, and is writing a biography of Creedence Clearwater Revival for Da Capo Press.

PHOTO: DARK MOON PICTURES / SHUTTERSTOCK ; "AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON" / PHOTOFEST

J. D. VANCE

Hollywood's turning his life into a movie.
Another election looms.
The floor is yours, James David Vance.

It's time for J. D. Vance–author, lawyer, venture capitalist, and product of Kentucky-holler hillbillies turned Ohio Rust Belt residents–to start limbering up the ol' vocal chords, since if the past presidential election is anything to go by, Vance will be in much TV demand.

A guy that's been called "The Trump Whisperer" and "Rust Belt Anger Translator," Vance, on the strength of a best-selling memoir about bootstrapping himself out of poverty and family dysfunction, was all over the airwaves in 2016 after Trump got elected.

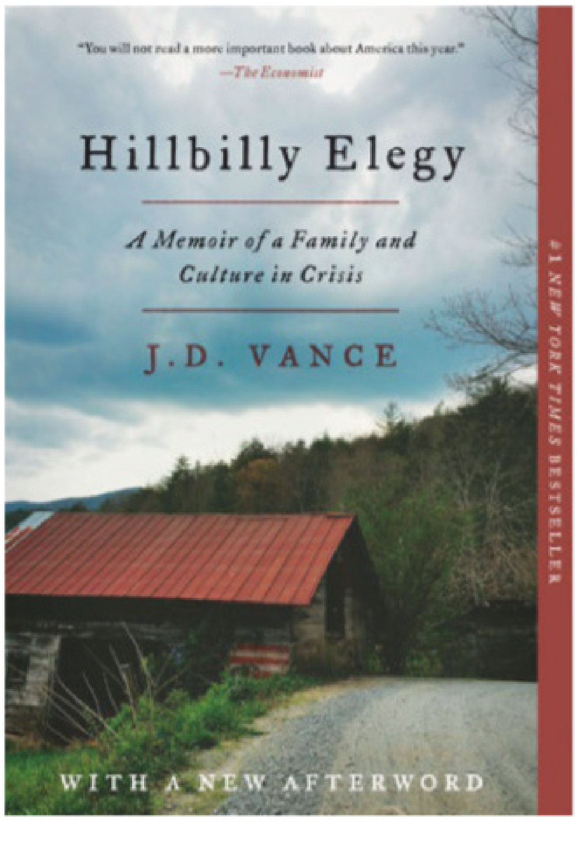
Why? Because most pundits didn't see that happening, and it happened in part because Trump was able to win states like Ohio and Wisconsin, which went to Barack Obama in 2012.

After the election-night surprise, Vance's phone wouldn't stop ringing. Cable-news producers wanted to book the guy who seemed to have a gut understanding of white working-class Trump voters, especially in the Rust Belt and Appalachia.

Here's Vance on how he spent November 9, 2016: "From 6 A.M. until around 11:30 P.M., I was on television effectively constantly, this idiot with a book." He offered that remark to the *Washington Post,* and noted that the book went to No. 1 on Amazon the next day.

Expect to hear a lot more about Vance's page-turner, *Hillbilly Elegy,* and not only because Trump and his base–people Vance grew up with in Middletown, a declining steel-mill town north of Cincinnati–will be in the news every hour until the 2020 election.

VANCE'S GRANDDAD WAS A VIOLENT DRUNK, AND IN ONE ACT OF RETALIATION, MAMAW SERVED HIM AN ARTFULLY ARRANGED PLATE OF GARBAGE FOR DINNER.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Hillbilly Elegy
A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis
J.D. VANCE
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

There's also a Netflix movie coming, with Ron Howard directing, and it started shooting in Georgia this summer. Amy Adams is playing Vance's mom, addicted to heroin and weddings (she married five times). Glenn Close is playing Mamaw, Vance's foul-mouthed, "pistol-packing lunatic" of a grandmother, who stepped in to raise Vance, and believed in him.

It was Mamaw's faith that helped propel Vance to Yale Law School after a four-year stint in the Marines and college at Ohio State. And it was at Yale that Vance, now 35, began writing about his past.

Like a third of Kentucky's Breathitt County "Hillbilly Corridor" residents, Vance's maternal grandparents left home looking for jobs between 1940 and 1960. They ended up in Middletown, and brought their hillbilly ways with them, as Vance vividly details. His granddad was a violent drunk, and in one act of retaliation, Mamaw served him an artfully arranged plate of garbage for dinner. (Something tells us that scene might make the movie.)

Missouri native Gabriel Basso (*Super 8; The Big C*) is playing J. D. Vance. As for the man himself, he's back in Ohio, after time in San Francisco working for a Peter Thiel-founded investment group. Based in Columbus, Vance is now running a nonprofit, Our Ohio Renewal, focused on the opioid crisis and bringing business investment to overlooked communities.

Vance has said he'd rather solve problems than talk on TV. But with a movie in the offing, and another presidential election looming, smart money says he's got some talking in his future.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARPERCOLLINS

FEAR OF A BLACK HORROR MOVIE

In *Horror Noire,* Xavier Burgin traces the long road from *Birth of a Nation* to *Get Out.*

BY PAUL JAMES

“WE’VE always loved horror. It’s just that horror, unfortunately, hasn’t always loved us.”

That observation from author Tananarive Due kicks off *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror,* a 2019 documentary that takes viewers on a guided tour through the history of horror movies and how the genre has treated African-American characters and creators.

And that treatment, you will not be shocked to learn, has been less than exemplary. Black audiences had to sit through several decades of wild-eyed voodoo priests and terrified “comic” sidekicks fleeing from ghosts before they finally got to see Duane Jones battling a horde of ghouls in George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead,* in 1968.

“When you think about it, a lot of the history of America for black people *is* horror,” says Xavier Burgin, the director of *Horror Noire* (currently available on the all-horror streaming service Shudder). Quite pointedly, he begins *Horror Noire* by discussing a movie that few film historians would think to classify as horror: D. W. Griffith’s 1915 Civil War epic, *Birth of a Nation.*

“For white audiences at the time,” Burgin says, “*Birth of a Nation* was a fun film that uplifted the Ku Klux Klan and was even shown in the White House. But for black folks, it showed us being lynched and killed, and reinforced many of the stereotypes that we see even today. For us, it was a horror film.”

The other key early work of black horror that Burgin cites, however, is one that few people have likely even heard of, much less seen: *Son of Ingagi,* a 1940 monster movie written by and starring future *Amos ’n Andy Show* costar Spencer Williams. With its shoestring budget and amateurish makeup, it would be easy to dismiss *Son of Ingagi* as Poverty Row trash.

But as Burgin points out, it was something of a revelation. Amidst all the plot business about a missing-link monster prowling a spooky old house, you also got to see a black lawyer and a female black scientist—the latter character, especially, a rarity even in 2019.

> **“FOR WHITE AUDIENCES...*BIRTH OF A NATION* WAS A FUN FILM THAT UPLIFTED THE [KKK] AND WAS EVEN SHOWN IN THE WHITE HOUSE. BUT FOR BLACK FOLKS, IT SHOWED US BEING LYNCHED AND KILLED.... FOR US, IT WAS A HORROR FILM.”**

“I went to a great film school, but even there, we weren’t learning much about black film history, and certainly not anything about black people in the horror genre,” Burgin says. “For me, sitting down and watching *Son of Ingagi* and other films by early black filmmakers for the first time was kind of amazing. You’ve got these people in the early 1940s, and seeing them fight against all the same stereotypes we’re fighting against today was mind-boggling. It was a real reminder that the battle for equal representation has been a very long fight.”

As *Horror Noire* argues, the history of black horror, in a nutshell, is the battle between *Birth of a Nation* on one hand and *Son of Ingagi* on the other: movies that reinforce grotesque stereotypes of black people versus movies made by black people, very often on the margins of the industry, trying to find ways to enter a genre that would rather marginalize and “other” them.

Or erase them altogether. Look at what happened in the 1950s, when horror moved away from the Gothic tradition of *Dracula, Frankenstein,* and *The Wolf Man* that had been prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s, and toward a more Atomic Age style of horror set in laboratories rather than castles and dungeons. Whereas black people could still find a place in those earlier movies (albeit in marginal, often demeaning parts), black scientists and lab assistants were impossible for Hollywood to imagine.

Even the breakthrough of *Night of the Living Dead*—one of the very few canonized horror films to feature an African-American lead character—is

PHOTO: GABRIEL OLSEN / GETYY IMAGES

A SHUDDER ORIGINAL
HORROR NOIRE
A DOCUMENTARY ON BLACK HORROR
SHUDDER

Xavier Burgin at the "Horror Noire" world premiere in Los Angeles

problematic. As director George Romero liked to tell interviewers, Duane Jones's part wasn't written specifically for a black actor; Jones just happened to give the best audition, and they cast him without rewriting the script.

"The whole idea of color-blind casting is a problem," Burgin argues. "What I mean by that is, I think if you're going to write a role, and then cast a black or brown person, that's great, but you should take the time to rewrite the script in a way that feels real for the character. I don't think Romero really understood how radical it was to have a black man at the forefront of his movie, fighting zombies, knocking out racist white people, being in charge and not being scared. It was a happy, smart accident that it worked out so well and added so many extra layers to the story. But thank God the filmmakers didn't fuck it up!"

The second half of *Horror Noire* shows more outright black horror films getting made, usually aided by a commercial boom for black films in general. The blaxploitation wave of the 1970s gives rise to *Blacula,* the *Exorcist* ripoff *Abby,* and *Ganja & Hess,* while the post-Spike Lee, post-John Singleton wave of the 1990s paves the way for the likes of *Tales From the Hood, Candyman,* and *Bones* (a particular favorite of Burgin's).

Black characters start popping up more frequently in mainstream horror movies, too—although those characters get killed off so early and with such reliability that when a black character makes it to the end of a movie (like LL Cool J in *Deep Blue Sea*), it practically counts as a twist.

You might expect *Horror Noire* to end on a hopeful note, with the spectacular, Oscar-winning emergence of *Get Out* and *Us* writer/director Jordan Peele, black horror's first name-brand auteur. But Burgin prefers to sound a note of skepticism—not about Peele's talent, but whether the doors are suddenly swinging wide-open for other black horror filmmakers.

"Things are promising, to a degree," he allows. "And of course it's great to see Ryan Coogler and Jordan Peele and Ava Duvernay and F. Gary Gray finding success. But that's only four or five people. They aren't the norm! There are hundreds of us on a smaller level still trying to get stuff off the ground.

"People always think that Hollywood is 100 percent about money—that if something makes money, they'll keep making more things like it. But that's not necessarily true! The *Fifty Shades of Grey* movies made *billions*. That is one of the most successful franchises to come out of Hollywood in recent years. And yet you saw absolutely no attempt to piggyback off that success. Why? Those decisions are mostly made by old white men, and regardless of money, if they don't see themselves reflected in it, they won't make it."

Paul James is a playwright, editor, broadcaster, and a film and pop-culture commentator for such outlets as CBC Radio, Salon, and Eighteen Bridges magazine. He is the cohost of the podcast "Trash, Art & the Movies." Follow him on Twitter @myelbow

A HORROR NOIRE CANON

Looking to learn more about the gripping, often subversive world of black horror? *Horror Noire* director Xavier Burgin suggests the following starting points:

Ganja & Hess (1973)

A languid, poetic vampire drama, it wasn't the commercial-minded blaxploitation shocker its producers hoped that writer/director Bill Gunn would deliver to them. But this story of a cultured, wealthy black anthropologist (*Night of the Living Dead*'s Duane Jones) who acquires an insatiable lust for blood thanks to a stab wound from a cursed dagger has steadily acquired a following among horror connoisseurs—including Spike Lee, who remade it in 2014 as *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*.

Blacula (1972)

If more straight-ahead blaxploitation fare is what you crave, *Blacula* should fit the bill nicely. But don't let the outrageous title fool you: *Blacula* is a surprisingly old-fashioned movie at heart, with an iconic star turn by classically trained William Marshall as Mamuwalde, an eighteenth-century African prince turned into a vampire by Count Dracula himself during a diplomatic mission to curb the slave trade. Pam Grier shows up in the sequel, 1973's *Scream Blacula Scream*.

Bones (2001)

Cinematographer turned director Ernest Dickerson may be the black filmmaker with the longest list of horror credits to his name. He made *Tales From the Crypt: Demon Knight,* a few episodes of *Masters of Horror, Fear Itself,* and *The Walking Dead,* as well as this underrated haunted-house chiller. Snoop Dogg plays Jimmy Bones, a street hustler and neighborhood legend who is murdered in the 1970s, but whose vengeful spirit returns decades later when his killers' sons try turning his home into a disco.

For further study…

Burgin also directs budding black horror scholars toward Robin R. Means Coleman's book, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from 1890 to Present* (the launching pad for his film), as well as Ashlee Blackwell's website Graveyard Shift Sisters, which looks at the latest developments in black horror film and literature from a female perspective.

ALIVE AND KICKING

Christina Applegate is having a stellar year, thanks to her hit Netflix series *Dead to Me.*

Back in the late 1980s, when *Married…With Children* was making a name for the brand-new Fox TV network, Christina Applegate was making prime-time viewers slobber as the dimwitted Kelly Bundy, with her big blonde hair, sexually charged one-liners, and skintight heavy metal outfits.

(Fun fact: Kelly was modeled after a white-minidress-wearing "rock slut" Applegate had seen in the 1988 documentary, *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years*.)

In reality, however, Applegate's teenage self couldn't have differed more from the sexpot role that catapulted her to fame. Inward and intense, she recently told the *L.A. Times* she was a "dark kid," adding, "I always thought serious projects were going to be my jam. But the show really helped me to let go of being so serious all the time."

Applegate got into acting because her single mother, an actress and singer, couldn't afford a babysitter, and would bring her months-old daughter to auditions. This was how she landed her first roles: as her mom's child in a Playtex baby-bottle commercial, and on a 1972 episode of *Days of Our Lives*.

Following her 11-season run as Kelly Bundy, Applegate starred in several sitcoms (*Samantha Who?, Up All Night*), appeared in movies (*The Sweetest Thing*), sang and danced on Broadway (in Neil Simon's *Sweet Charity*), and did animation voiceovers (*King of the Hill*). But it was the role of Veronica Corningstone in the 2004 Will Ferrell hit, *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy,* that put her back on America's radar. It's a part she's described as "one of the best times I've ever had in my life."

Alongside Applegate's decades of comic acting, she's endured plenty of real-life drama, including a breast cancer diagnosis in 2008, after which she underwent a double mastectomy. The harrowing experience led her to create a foundation, Right Action for Women (@RightAct4Women), which provides education and assistance to women who are at increased risk for the disease.

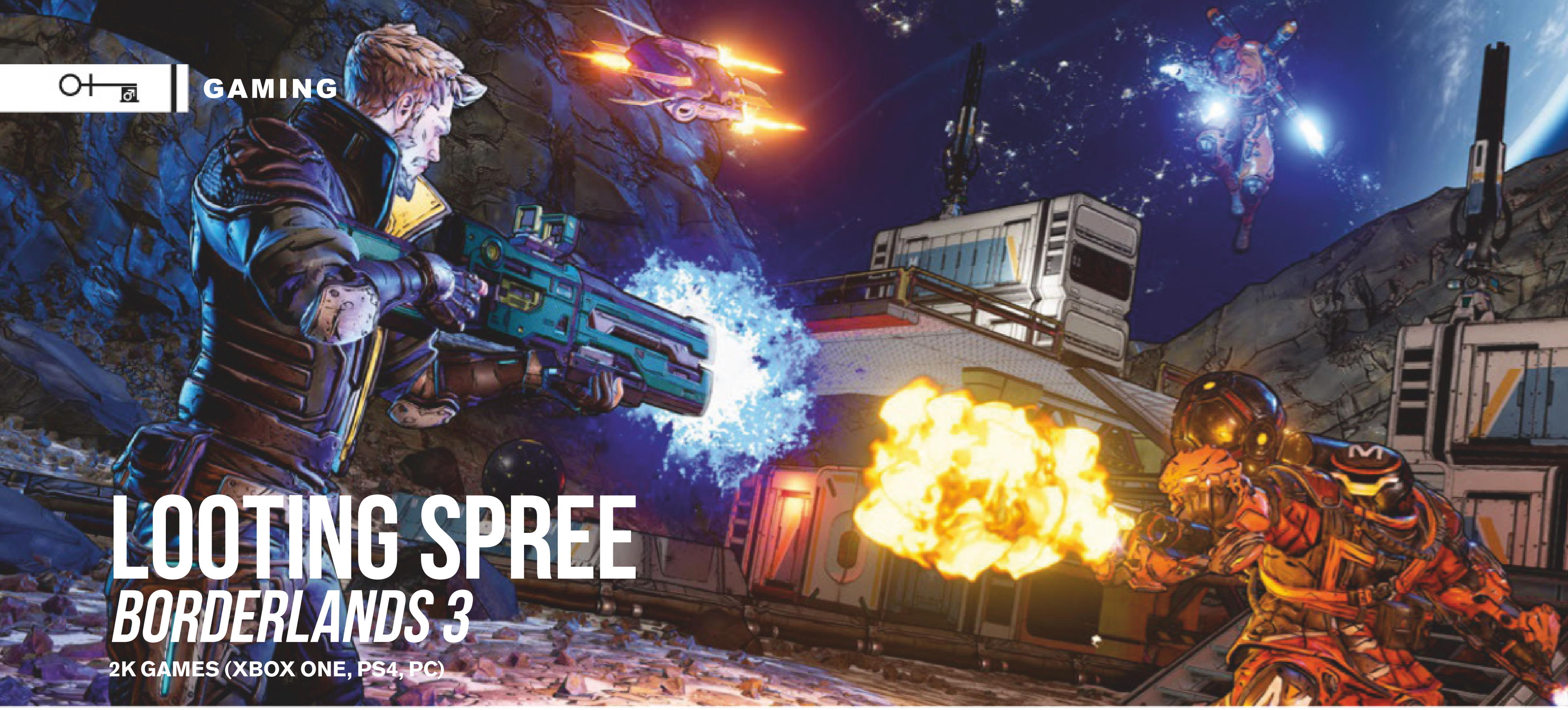
Happily, 2019 is turning out to be a good year for the 47-year-old, who's enjoying yet another career high point with the release of Netflix's critically acclaimed "traumedy," *Dead to Me*. In July, she received an Emmy nomination (Lead Actress in a Comedy) for her role.

Applegate plays Jen, a widow who recently lost her husband in a hit-and-run. When the show begins, Jen is about to meet her new BFF, Judy (Linda Cardellini), in a grief counseling seminar. Unbeknownst to Jen, Judy was driving the car that killed her husband. The ten-episode series, now gearing up for a second season, paints a smart, funny, and nuanced portrait of the two women's lives, relationships, and their imperfect reactions to loss.

"Some people have been confused by [the show]," Applegate told the *New York Times*. "But in life we laugh and cry and we get surprised by things and we get shocked by things and people are not what they seem. It's what life feels like—dark and twisty and funny."

Linda Cardellini and Christina Applegate in Netflix's "Dead to Me"

PHOTO: FABRICE DALLANESE/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES; DEAD TO ME / NETFLIX



LOOTING SPREE

BORDERLANDS 3

2K GAMES (XBOX ONE, PS4, PC)

It's the looting, not the shooting, that helped the *Borderlands* series pioneer a new genre: An addicting hybrid of role-playing games and first-person blasters. And while blockbuster homages like *Destiny* and *The Division* tweaked the formula, *Borderlands 3* takes the next logical leap, creating a quest for loot that's essentially never-ending.

As in the previous installments, you and up to three friends embark on combat missions across the planet Pandora, where fallen foes spill exotic guns and ammo like militarized piñatas. It's these spoils of war that keep you mainlining mission after mission through all-night play sessions, chasing just one more exotic doodad. The joke's on completist players: The game's created-at-random arms come in a billion combinations in terms of range, damage level, ammo capacity, and special sauce (fire attacks, lightning, sickening radiation, etc.). You'll never collect them all, and you'll always have a new toy to play with.

As in any role-playing game, *Borderlands 3* is a daily grind: You earn experience for besting enemies and completing missions, then spend these points on new and wildly varied skills for your Vault Hunter avatar. The new Operative type wields a range of gadgets on top of their weapons. The droid Beastmaster FL4K can sic sidekick creatures on opponents. Each character can have up to three unique skills to create unusual build combinations. Add randomly appearing modifiers that affect character class, grenades, or shields to this mix, and you'll never field the same fighter twice or wage a tired battle.

If you do grow weary of warring on Pandora, you can board your spacecraft and blast off to strange worlds, finding new factions to fight and, of course, fresh loot to pillage. The combat itself has been enhanced with new crouch-sliding moves and wall-climbing abilities. *Borderlands 3* even integrates Twitch streams so you can show off your one-of-a-kind build, or just see what other players are rustling up.

CALL TO ARMS: THE BEST PHONE GAMES (AND THE BEST GAME PHONE)

> 4 <

RAZER PHONE 2

(RAZER/ANDROID)

Beefy and barely pocket-friendly, the Razer Phone 2 might not be the most practical smartphone, but it is the ultimate portable gaming system—not to mention a multimedia powerhouse. Credit goes to its punchy specs and spectacular screen, which has a refresh rate twice as zippy as other Android devices. An advanced cooling system keeps it from broiling your hands during marathon sessions.

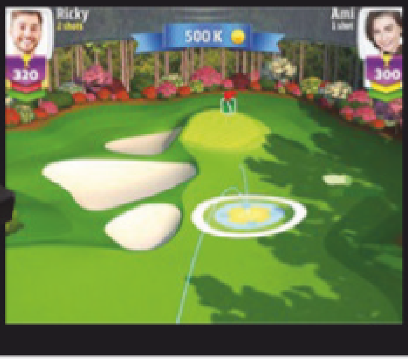
> 3 <

FOR THE CASUAL PLAYER:

GOLF CLASH

(PLAYDEMIC/ANDROID, iOS)

You don't have to play—or even like—real-world golf to appreciate this pick-up-and-play pocket version. Its simple shot system relies on a flick of the finger but leaves room for finesse on both the fairway and the putting green. Strike up a game with a stranger or friend online and play through a hole in just enough time to finish your morning commute.



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FOR THE GRAPHICS ADDICT:

FORZA STREET

(MICROSOFT/ANDROID, iOS)

Car aficionados buy the *Forza* series for its impeccable recreations of exotic autos, but sometimes you just want to blast past tourist traffic in a $300K Lamborghini Huracán on Ocean Drive in Miami. This portable spin-off offers the same lavish attention to visual details but with simplified controls and more casual driving physics. Just choose an event, pair with competitors, and hit the gas.

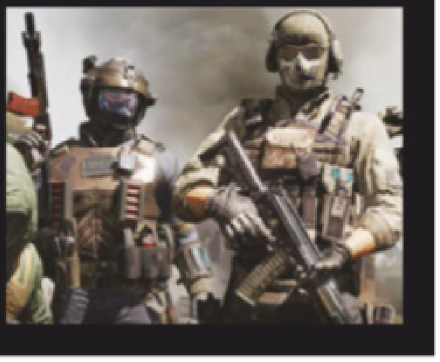
> 1 <

FOR THE CONSOLE SNOB:

CALL OF DUTY: MOBILE

(ACTIVISION/ANDROID, iOS)

More of a greatest hits than a sequel, *Call of Duty: Mobile* collects the most portable-friendly maps, weapons, and game modes from across the franchise. Control has been tweaked to be more forgiving on the touch screen. If you could never score a headshot against the smartass kids who play the console games around the clock, you might actually have some fun with this version.



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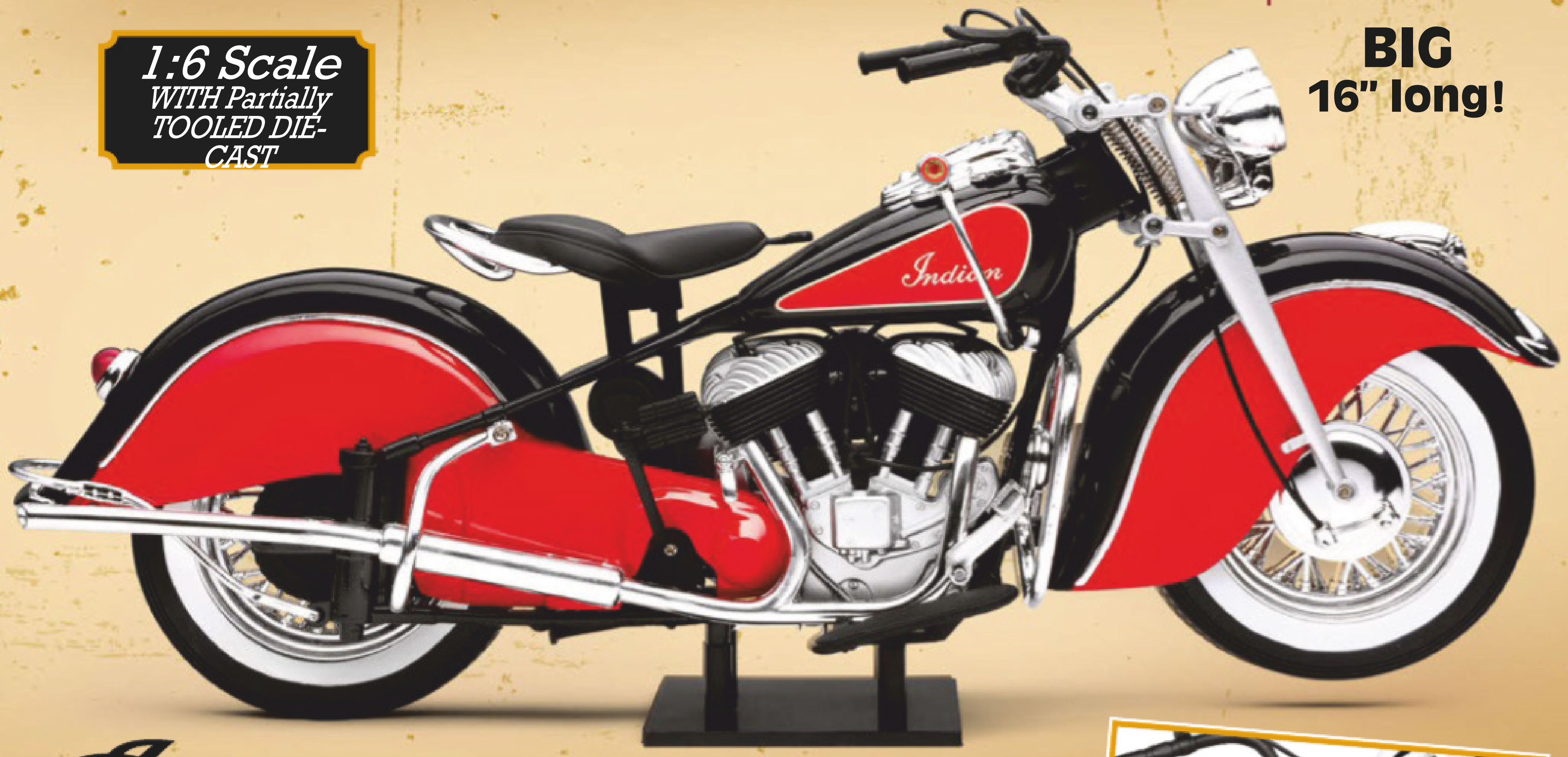

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PIGSKIN IS HERE

NFL insider Aaron Nagler tells us what to expect in 2019.

BY PHIL HANRAHAN

YOU know what's better than flying coach? Flying business class. Upgrades are good things, and that's what we've got—an upgrade—for Game On's 2019 football preview.

Last year I slung the punditry in this space. My crystal ball foresaw success for the Rams, Chargers, and Saquon Barkley, so that was okay, but I didn't anticipate the Bears rocketing from a 5-11 record to 12-4, nor did I expect Baker Mayfield to flash the way he did.

For this season, I thought, *Hmmm, why not reach out to someone who has spent years writing about football, podcasting about football, webcasting about football, tweeting about football, Facebook livestreaming about football, and, yes, reporting on the NFL?*

So I turned to Aaron Nagler, who has been Bleacher Report's lead NFL blogger, a *Sports Illustrated* football analyst, and a multimedia reporter for news giant Gannett, covering the Packers. He also cofounded CheeseheadTV.com, a site I hit after every Packers game for Aaron's "Gut Reactions" post, where he delivers his unvarnished takes.

On Twitter, Aaron launches football thoughts to 64,000 followers, an audience that includes current and former NFL players, along with NFL Network's Rich Eisen and ESPN's Trey Wingo.

A former high-school quarterback in Appleton, Wisconsin, Aaron ended up in New York City, working for a company in the financial-services sector. But one day he decided to break off that route and pursue a more football-focused path.

Since we're both diehard Cheeseheads, I proposed one ground rule: I suggested he look to the other 31 teams when highlighting individual players.

WHICH TEAM MAKES A JUMP TO THE TOP OF THEIR DIVISION?

It feels like cheating, because everyone sees it coming, but I'll go with the Browns. Freddie Kitchens, though he appeared to be a last resort during the hiring process, is the perfect counterbalance to the big-time personalities and outsized expectations in Cleveland. I think their talent level is too dynamic to suppress.

WHICH PLAYER MAKES THE BIGGEST JUMP?

Respecting our rule, I won't say Packers running back Aaron Jones. So give me Jets wideout Robbie Anderson. We've seen flashes, but with a young, rocket-armed QB, Sam Darnold, and a new head coach and play-caller, I think he's primed for a huge year.

WHICH OFF-SEASON ACQUISITION WILL SHINE FOR HIS NEW TEAM? WHO DISAPPOINTS?

Everyone talks about offensive difference-makers, but I think safety Tyrann Mathieu is going to have an All Pro-type campaign for new Chiefs defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo. And for the life of me, I can't figure out why the Broncos backed up the Brinks truck for tackle Ja'Wuan James. It speaks to the suspect state of offensive-line play around the league, no doubt.

ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN, HOW BULLISH ARE YOU ON THE DRAFT'S FIRST PICK, QB KYLER MURRAY?

I'm cautiously optimistic, so put me down for a seven.

WHO WINS ROOKIE OF THE YEAR HONORS?

Offense: It pains me to say it, but Bears running back David Montgomery.
Defense: Bills tackle Ed Oliver.

GIVE US YOUR MOST CONTROVERSIAL NFL OPINION.

Wins and losses are not a quarterback statistic. Stop your internal dialogue. I'm right.

BEST FOOTBALL MOVIE EVER MADE?

Everybody's All-American, followed closely by *Wildcats.* Both from the eighties.

PHOTO: DOTSHOCK / SHUTTERSTOCK

TRADEMARK TWITTER PHRASE

"Whole lotta ballgame left."

MOST MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER WITH SOMEONE IN THE NFL?
Back in 2011, during Packers training camp, I was at a bar and ended up talking football with a bunch of personnel guys. This was the summer the Eagles had put together the self-declared "Dream Team," and Alonzo Highsmith, now VP of Football Operations for the Browns, was making fun of the idea, mercilessly. Of course, everything he was saying came to pass—all his predictions about a lack of chemistry and clashing egos. I got introduced to an unassuming guy at the end of the bar. It was Brian Gutekunst, then the Southeast region scout, now Packers GM.

He had a quiet intensity. While everyone else guffawed and generally tore it up, Gutekunst sipped his beer, laughed along a little, and offered occasional opinions on players.

We started talking. He told me about his job, how much he loved to scout. In the NFL these days, things are so regimented, access-wise, it's hard to have an authentic moment. Gutekunst showed me that you didn't need a larger-than-life personality to have an intense desire to be the best.

ON FEBRUARY 2, 2020, WHAT TWO TEAMS ARE WE WATCHING?
The Chiefs and Saints.

WHO WINS?
Chiefs.

You can follow Aaron at @AaronNagler or visit CheeseheadTV.com.

FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

SOME GAUDY TURNAROUNDS

2001 New England Patriots
5-11 ▶ 11-5
QB: Tom Brady
Coach: Bill Belichick

2004 Pittsburgh Steelers
6-10 ▶ 15-1
QB: Ben Roethlisberger
Coach: Bill Cowher

2004 San Diego Chargers
4-12 ▶ 12-4
QB: Drew Brees
Coach: Marty Schottenheimer

2008 Miami Dolphins
1-15 ▶ 11-5
QB: Chad Pennington
Coach: Tony Sparano

2013 Kansas City Chiefs
2-12 ▶ 11-5
QB: Alex Smith
Coach: Andy Reid

2016 Dallas Cowboys
4-12 ▶ 13-3
QB: Dak Prescott
Coach: Jason Garrett

ROBBIE ANDERSON, WR, NEW YORK JETS

Year	Receptions	Yards	Per-catch average	TDs
2016	42	587	14.0	2
2017	63	941	14.9	7
2018	50	752	15.0	6

AARON'S DIVISIONAL PICKS

NFC East
1. Eagles
2. Cowboys
3. Giants
4. Redskins

NFC South
1. Panthers
2. Saints
3. Falcons
4. Buccaneers

NFC North
1. Bears
2. Packers
3. Vikings
4. Lions

NFC West
1. Seahawks
2. Rams
3. 49ers
4. Cardinals

★ ★ ★ ★

AFC East
1. Patriots
2. Jets
3. Bills
4. Dolphins

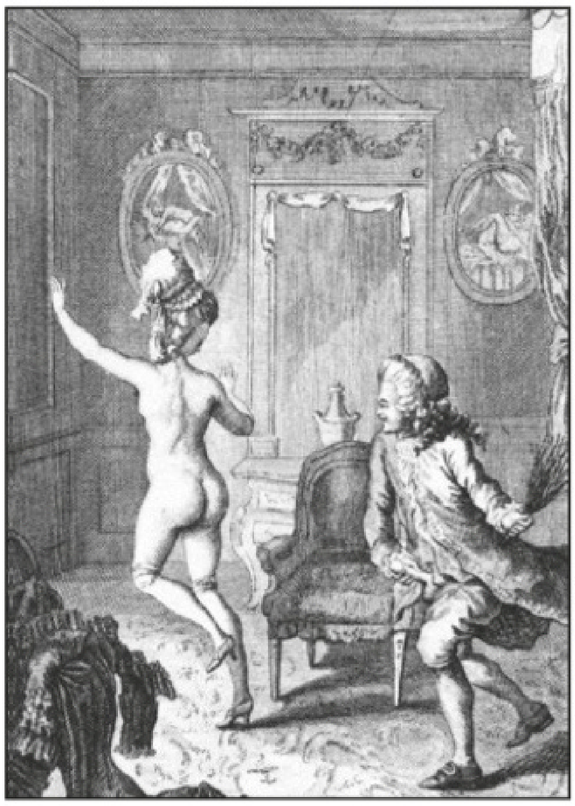
AFC South
1. Colts
2. Texans
3. Titans
4. Jaguars

AFC North
1. Browns
2. Ravens
3. Steelers
4. Bengals

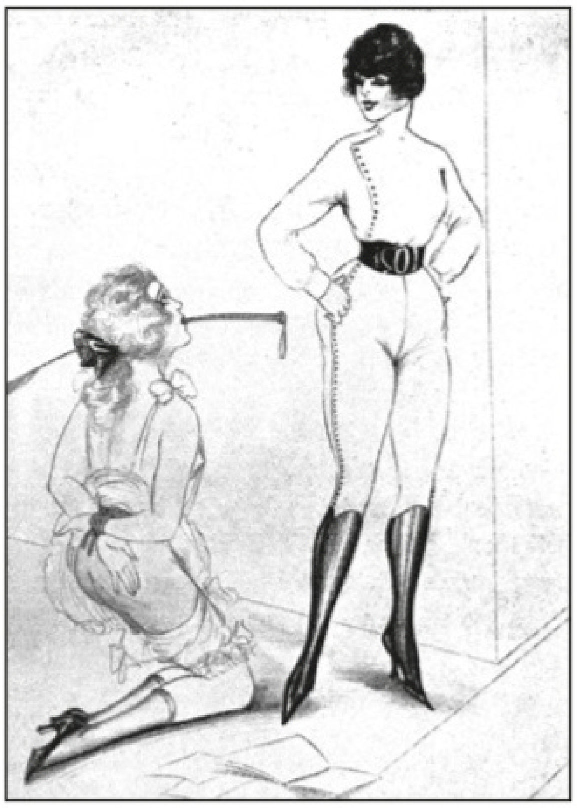
AFC West
1. Chiefs
2. Chargers
3. Raiders
4. Broncos

PLEASURE AND PAIN

A new volume compiles three centuries of BDSM images.



Eighteenth-century flogging illustration



“Fetching the whip,” Germany, circa 1920

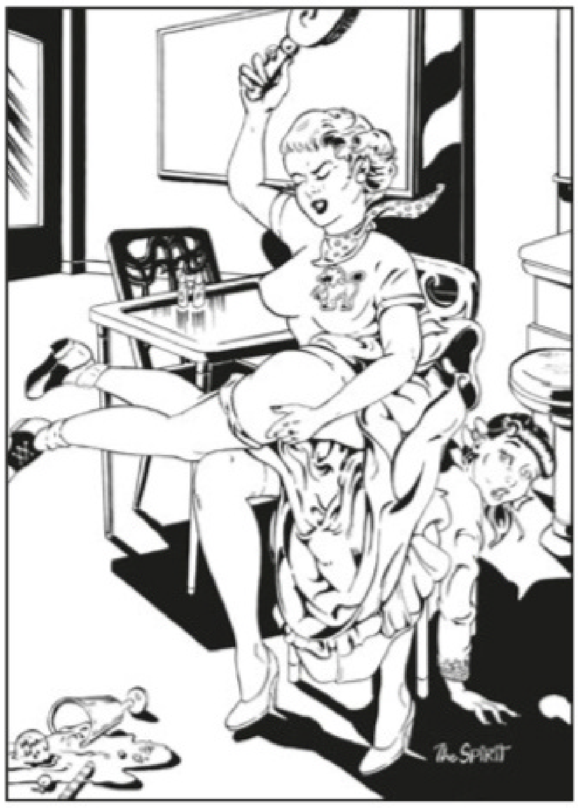


Illustration from the book “Spank Me”

DELIGHTFULLY perverse kinksters have been indulging in acts of erotic punishment for thousands of years, getting a unique thrill from giving and receiving pleasure and pain.

Just as in the present day, there were those in antiquity who craved the kiss of a whip in the bedroom and actively sought to fulfill their masochistic desires.

One of the earliest known European works of visual art to depict punishment in a sexual context is a fresco unearthed in Italy that dates back to around 490 B.C. Discovered in 1960, the wall painting in the Tomb of the Whipping is badly damaged but shows a debauched three-way involving a woman being spanked and flogged by her two male lovers.

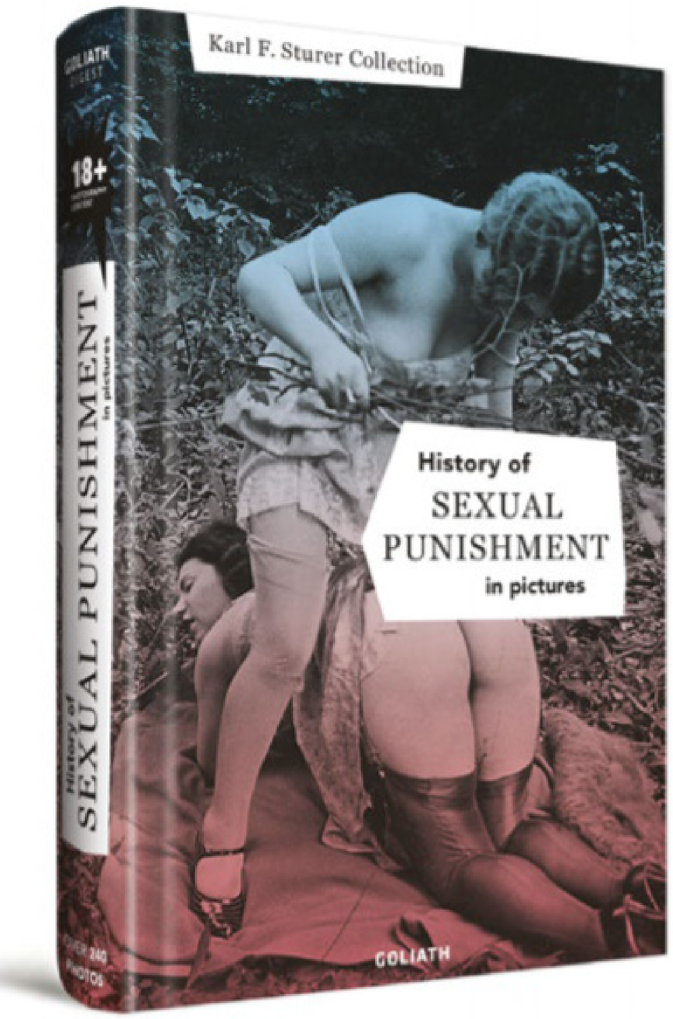
And the Kama Sutra, an ancient Indian text on sexuality, contains advice on hitting, biting, and pinching to enhance a lover’s pleasure.

But that’s only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to historical depictions and descriptions of erotic punishment.

Prominent eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his autobiography *Confessions,* minced no words when it came to his love of power games in the boudoir: “To fall at the feet of an imperious mistress, obey her mandates, or implore pardon, were for me the most exquisite enjoyments.”

During the same era, John Cleland sparked a firestorm with the release of *Fanny Hill: or, the Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*—one of the first English-language pornographic novels—which described a prostitute birching a client before being punished herself in return.

A century later, Victorian Britain was a study in contrasts. Though society was bound by a rigid sense of morality, interest in sex flourished among the population like never before.


Karl F. Sturer Collection
History of SEXUAL PUNISHMENT in pictures
GOLIATH
18+
GOLIATH DIGEST
OVER 240 PHOTOS

An explosion of erotic literature, artwork, and photography occurred, with an almost obsessive focus on what was considered perverse—including spanking, birching, and flogging. The floodgates had been opened, and thousands of images of punishment scenes were circulated in books and magazines. The notorious publication *The Pearl,* purveyor of pornographic tales, poems, and more, made a kinky name for itself before British authorities closed it down in 1880, accusing it of obscenity.

During last century's sexual revolution, the BDSM subculture, with its power exchanges and roleplaying, emerged from the shadows and came into its own, with its transgressive elements spreading to fashion, books, and movies.

Now, daring and diverse publisher Goliath Books has assembled a striking array of erotic images from the past 300 years (some of which are seen here) to create the volume *History of Sexual Punishment—in pictures* (272 pages, $35).

With more than 200 illustrations and photos, this book explores the artistic representations of sadists and masochists who have left their (ahem) mark on history. *goliathbooks.com*

Daguerreotype circa 1840

Early twentieth-century postcard

"Graffiti Girl," from the book "Pulp Fetish"

Photograph by Jim Weathers,
from the book "Kinky Bondage Obsession"

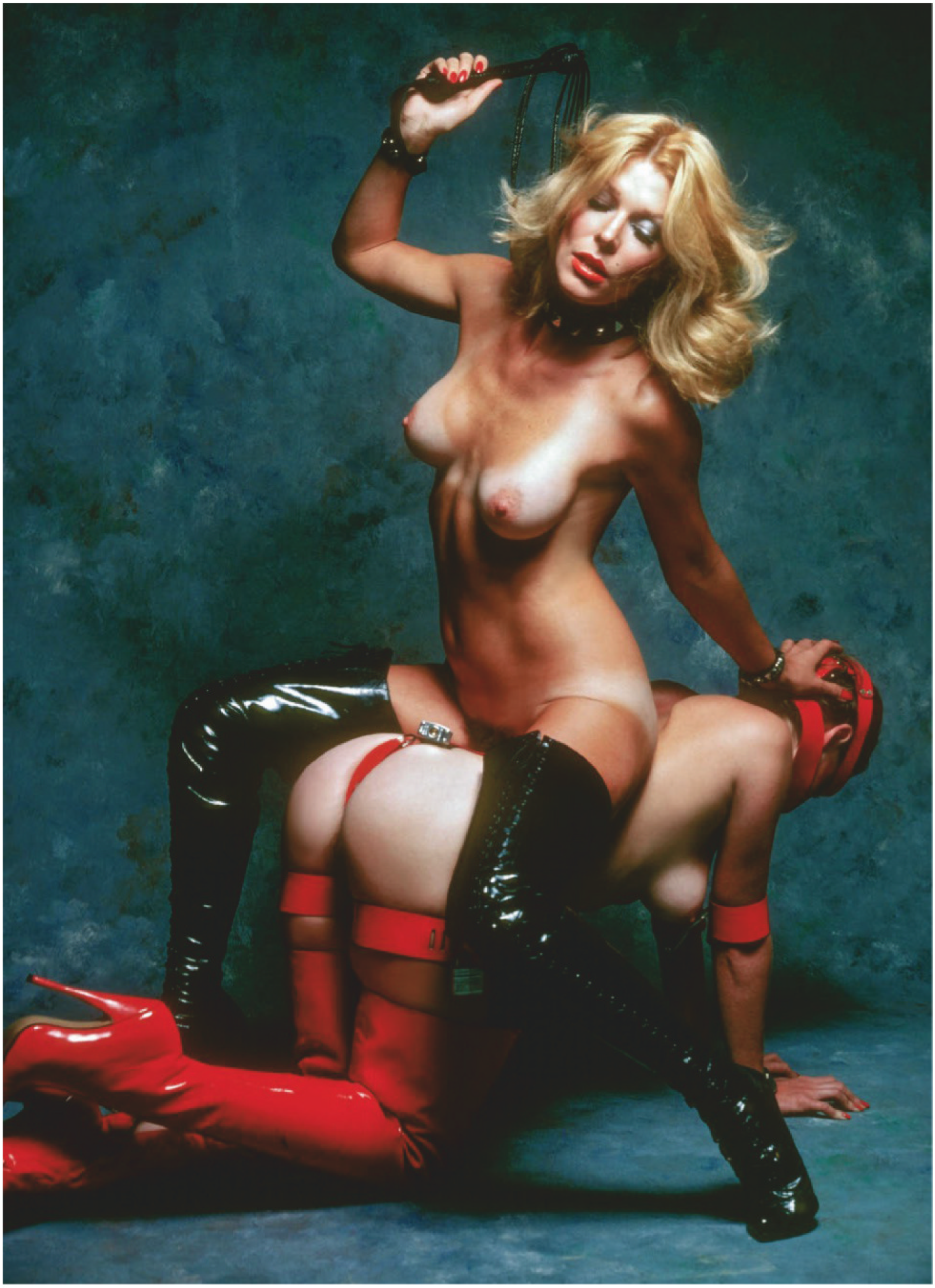
THE VAULT

POWER PLAY

EROTIC adventure never goes out of style. In this issue, we look back at daring images from our collection, showing the sensual give-and-take between kinky companions.

PHOTOGRAPHY
STAN MALINOWSKI, EARL MILLER, JOHN DAVID

MY FUNNY VALENTINE
February 1976



MY FUNNY VALENTINE
February 1976

HERE COME DE JUDGE
October 1988

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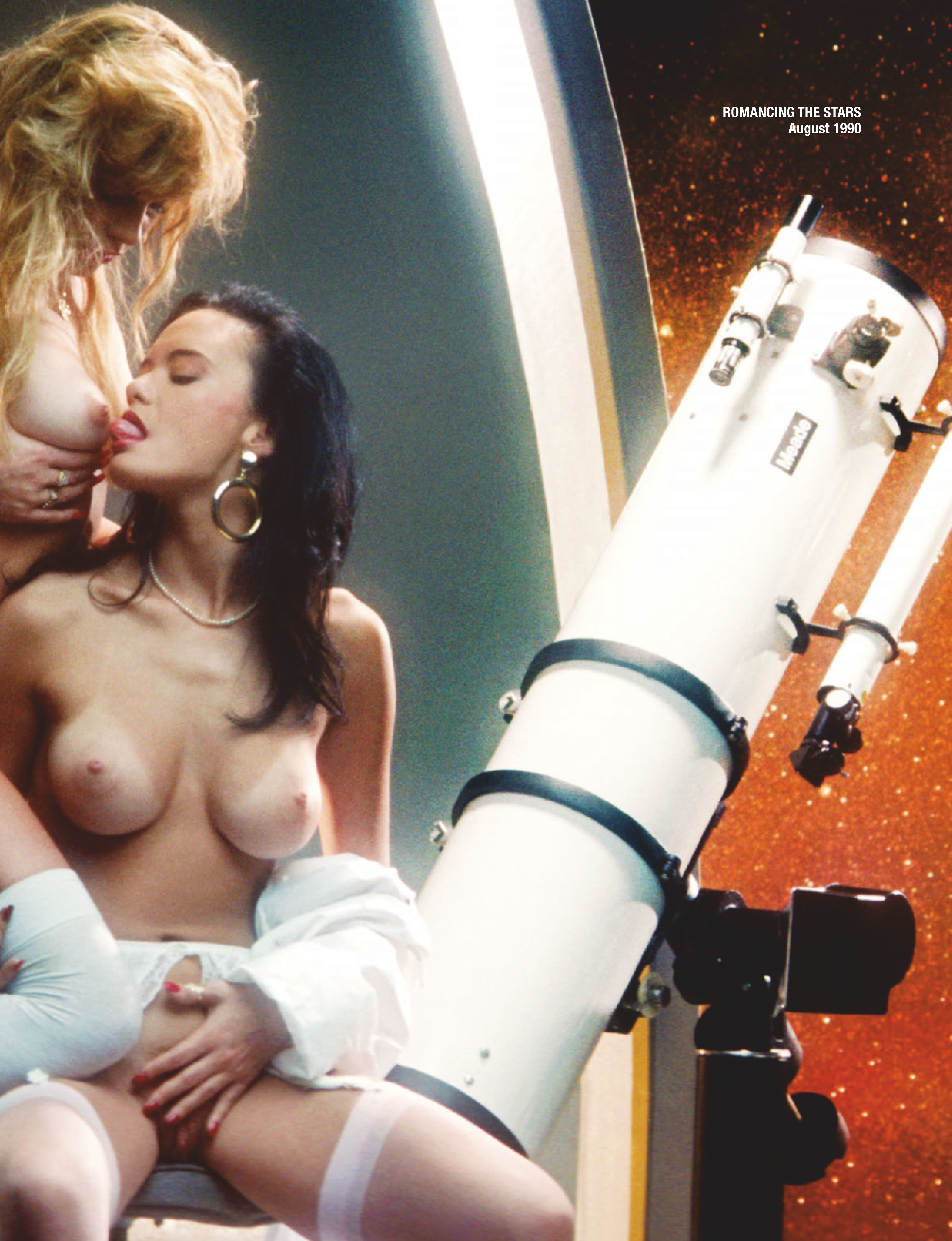
THE LADY AND THE STABLE BOY
May 1977



ROMANCING THE STARS
August 1990

FEATURE

ROUGH RIDERS

Inside Angola Prison's controversial inmate rodeo.

BY ELLE HARDY

PHOTO: COOPER NEILL / GETTY IMAGES

JOE Keene—a 34-year-old Louisiana prisoner—wears a protective Kevlar vest in case he takes a bull's hoof or horn to the torso, or hits the ground hard. Fastening the buttons to a black-and-white striped shirt, his convict-cowboy uniform, he prays to the soul of his late mother, who passed away nine years ago. A big part of her had already died when he was convicted of murder in 2004, and his prayer is more a plea for mercy from a woman who, trying to keep her son out of jail, testified in court that the bloody khaki shorts police found at the family's Baton Rouge apartment were hers, and that the blood was hers, too.

A bull in chute number six is huffing and heaving. Arms draped over a rail, Keene takes a look at the animal's explosive mass of roiling muscle. A white inmate, tall, rangy, and sinewy, Keene tells himself he's a real rodeo rider, not an animal in a zoo. Some of the spectators in this jammed arena might be here to see him get violently tossed, or worse, but Keene ignores that. When the loudspeaker announces his name and number, and he's riding that bull, he briefly feels free. For a short, thrilling moment, his jail cell is forgotten. And if he rides well, he earns applause and accolades, and makes a good memory for those endless hours of confinement.

There's a whole heap of pageantry before Keene gets to ride, though. "It's going to get wild and western, you can tell!" says a ring announcer on horseback, speaking into his wireless mic. Behind him, caged and corralled animals snort and buck in agreement.

A prisoner with a heaven-sent voice sings "God Bless America." Later, the audience stands and applauds in honor of the U.S. military as America's wars are recited. The clapping surges at mention of Operation Desert Storm and the Iraq War. There are people throughout this arena who fought in these wars, or are the children of those who did.

After "The Star-Spangled Banner" is sung, a cowgirl in tight jeans and a snug denim jacket, waving a big American flag, does two laps of the ring on her horse. She's trailed by a decorated wagon bearing a banner inscribed "Friends of New Orleans Police Department." Riding up front in the wagon, a "king" and his "queen" wave to thousands of spectators, people who have traveled here from Georgia, Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi. As the announcer hails the various states, people roar. Louisiana gets the biggest cheer, though, because that's where we are.

We're on the 18,000-acre grounds of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the country's largest maximum-security prison, 130 miles northwest of New Orleans. It's known as Angola Prison, a name nodding to the land's antebellum history as Angola Plantations, worked by slaves, many born in Africa's Angola. It's also called "The Farm" and "Alcatraz of the South," though that second moniker is dying out. On one weekend every April, and four October weekends, this purpose-built arena hosts the Angola Prison Rodeo.

Ten thousand spectators cheer ten rodeo events, including Bust Out, Joe Keene's favorite. The name is a winking reference to a prison break. Bust Out features six convict-cowboys on six angry bulls, with the animals sprung from their chutes simultaneously. The last man still atop his bull wins. Since most of the prisoners are untrained, they generally bite the dust as soon as the chute-gate opens. But Keene is a 19-time Bust Out champion. In fact, he won this event the day before. However, on this April Sunday, he doesn't have his best stuff. He rides well for a few seconds, then hits the ground.

"I just didn't feel right—in the only place I ever feel right," he tells me later.

As a rodeo clown distracts his bull, Keene is dragged clear by fellow convicts. Then "Summer of '69" starts playing, and spectators whoop along to Bryan Adams recalling the best days of his life. I hear a clown mutter the phrase "bad dude," and I'm not sure if he's talking about Keene, his bull, or Bryan Adams.

Moments later, the ring announcer declares, "And now, Pinball!"

In this event, convicts wearing Kevlar and face-guarded helmets stand inside hula hoops set on the dirt. A bull is released into the arena and rampages around. The inmate brave enough, or lucky enough, to hold his ground longest wins. This year, Pinball is sponsored by Daniel Miremont, president of a Baton Rouge sewer system company.

* * *

JOE Keene was convicted of murdering a Baton Rouge man, who was bludgeoned and strangled with Keene's belt, in the victim's apartment. He had an accomplice, a local drug-dealer.

Keene, 20 at the time, changed his story in the three statements he gave police, but it appears he had been doing some minor plumbing work for the victim, and was in need of money to pay for drugs. He claimed his accomplice had threatened to shoot him unless he carried out the attack.

In email exchanges we have after the rodeo weekend, Keene focuses on the fact that his accomplice was able to plead to a lesser charge. He says it's not right that "someone can hold a gun to your head and make you kill someone, and they walk away with the less part of time." Neither prosecutors nor the jury found Keene's account of the killing credible, however.

Keene tells me he'd never been in trouble before the murder, that he turned himself in to the police, and that I'm the first person he's told this to. Loneliness is a theme in what he shares, and he is full of regret: that his parents sought to cover up his crime, and that he's the end of the line for his father's genes. When he reflects on his incarceration, Keene says, "I am…just waiting to die, which is crazy…you know."

Being white, he is in the minority here—80 percent of the inmates are black—but as a man serving life without parole, he's also in a majority. Life without parole is the only sentence, besides the death penalty, that Louisiana gives for murder.

According to a Sentencing Project report, Louisiana has more people serving life without parole than Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi,

PHOTOS: FRANK McMAINS

Alabama, and Tennessee combined. This in a state that has had America's highest incarceration rate for years. Its number of prisoners has grown 30 times faster than its population since the late seventies. Some hold up Louisiana—with its strict sentencing and pronounced law-and-order ethos—as an emblem of what's good about America's justice system. But for others, the state represents what's horribly wrong with it.

Angola is often referred to as a "company town." That company being the prison. But for over two decades, it would have been more accurate to call it a city-state governed by an absolute monarch. Longtime warden Burl Cain, who stated that his top priority was "moral rehabilitation," introduced a Baptist seminary, prizefighting, and a culture of corporate kickbacks and side deals that led to his stepping down in 2016 amid corruption inquiries.

The island of Manhattan could fit inside the prison's sprawling property, which is given over to farmland where gun towers and razor wire don't predominate. The prison houses 6,300 prisoners and employs 1,800 staffers, from corrections officers to maintenance workers.

The past isn't a foreign country at Angola Prison. To be reminded of this area's bitter plantation history, you just have to gaze out over the landscape. Seated on horseback, mostly white guards patrol the fields of wheat, corn, soybeans, sorghum, and cotton that mostly black inmates harvest under a relentless sun for as little as four cents an hour.

Many of the prison staff live with their families on-site, within the B-Line, a small town, essentially, with its own parks, swimming pool, tennis court, fishing lake, and nine-hole Prison View Golf Course, which is open to the law-abiding public. To play the prison links as a non-staffer, you just have to give 48 hours' notice before turning up with your clubs.

THE ARENA ATMOSPHERE IS HEADY, SOMETIMES HYSTERICAL, AND HAS SOMETHING OF THE ROMAN COLOSSEUM, AN OLD WEST MEDICINE SHOW, AND A SLAPSTICK COMEDY ROUTINE ABOUT IT.

"It's a great place to grow up," says a teenage girl serving food at one of the rodeo's various concession stands. "My dad's a warden. I wanna be one, too."

More than 70,000 people visit the Angola Prison grounds each year, viewing it as a Louisiana attraction. It's not just the rodeo and golf course, with its tee markers in the shape of handcuffs, that draws them. The prison's place on the dark tourism trail is secure thanks to its museum, which houses "Gruesome Gertie," an electric chair built by inmates in which 87 of their peers were executed, including Elmo Patrick Sonnier, subject of *Dead Man Walking,* the book and movie. In 1991, the chair was retired in favor of lethal injection.

* * *

ANGOLA'S biggest draw, though, is the rodeo.

Some of those seated in the 30-year-old arena are there to see murderers, armed robbers, and rapists get tossed and stomped by broncos and bulls—as though justice has found another way to be meted out. Others, mostly sorority girls in short shorts and abbreviated tops, appear to be shopping for husbands. And then there are the prisoners' families, for whom this is an opportunity to see their captive fathers, brothers, and sons appear in a special public setting, with a chance to shine. The arena atmosphere is heady, sometimes hysterical, and has something of the Roman Colosseum, an Old West medicine show, and a slapstick comedy routine about it.

Five hours before the rodeo starts in earnest, the grounds beside the arena are taken over by an arts and crafts fair, where inmates do a keen trade in items they've created inside the prison: paintings, carvings, jewelry boxes, furniture, leather goods, wooden duck calls. Keene himself, who draws and paints, has been exhibiting at the fair for six years, he tells me.

"I have a lot of people that come back to the rodeo to buy stuff from me year after year," he says. Some of them, he adds, just want something "they can say came from a killer."

The food stands sell Louisiana staples like catfish po' boys, and red beans and rice. There's a petting zoo whose animals bring forth excited squeals from children. Some of the prisoners selling art are inside individual steel-mesh cages, tarped for shade, set in a few rows. Others, designated "trustees" by the prison (a category dependent on the convict's crime and behavior in lockup) can walk freely, mingling with customers. Some convicts sit quietly in patches of shade and cuddle their grandkids. Others try out their rusty charms on women, the ice-cream sundaes in their hands doing most of the melting. The impression is one of wholesomeness under mild duress—a warm smile with a few missing teeth.

If a patron, after some bartering, wants to purchase an item from a caged prisoner, the man passes a slip of paper through the mesh, which is then carried to a cashier kiosk.

No one's taking photos, since cameras and cell phones are not permitted on the grounds.

Prison guards mill around, of course, though a lot of them are also positioned at the entrance to the rodeo and fairgrounds, or are selling drinks at the food stands.

Calvin Stewart, one of the organizers of last year's Angola work stoppage (protesting the prison farm and its forced labor, which he likens to a slave system), tells me to keep an eye out for Keene. I ask where he is, but I'm met with shrugs and guesses. (I'll later learn he'd been inside the arena, helping prep the animals.) As I search, one of the caged men, a small white guy with a mustache, gives me a stare so cold my blood freezes. I don't know what crime he committed, but I've never witnessed a look projecting that kind of darkness.

I meet a trustee prisoner-artist with dark brown hair and a goatee, a couple decades older than Keene. Referring to the men in cages, mostly rapists and pedophiles, he says to me, "Someone should have said, they're the ones not allowed anywhere near women and children. I can tell you that watching movies with them isn't a lot of fun."

During an autumn rodeo weekend in 2017, a convicted killer and a 13-year-old girl were seen emerging from a restroom together. Her family claimed a sexual violation took place. It became a national story—an alleged rape taking place during the rodeo. The convict, Laderrick Davis, serving a life sentence, was transferred to another prison, in part for his own safety. Then on November 10, the parish sheriff and chief of Louisiana's prison system said the evidence gathered, including the results of a rape kit administered to the girl, showed no sexual contact had taken place. They also said the girl denied any contact.

The statements prompted one family member to tell New Orleans news station WGNO, "I feel like it was a cover-up. I feel like they are trying to sweep it under the rug."

* * *

IN 2004, the year he represented Joe Keene, attorney D. Bert Garraway was attacked in court by another one of his clients, who put him in a headlock and slashed at his face and neck with a razor.

"I've contended all along that this guy is nuts," a bloodied Garraway said. "And to be honest, this pretty much confirms it. What kind of rational person would attack his own lawyer?"

His client might well have been crazy, and a criminal, but there isn't much love for defense lawyers around these parts, either.

As Angola is to the prison-industrial complex, so Louisiana is to shoddy legal defense. Reading about Keene's crime and trial, I discovered a classic case of American-style injustice, a story that Keene, poor and semiliterate, with an eighth-grade education, had no hope of articulating on his own.

AS ANGOLA IS TO THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX, SO LOUISIANA IS TO SHODDY LEGAL DEFENSE.

The jury found him guilty of both conspiracy to commit second-degree murder and second-degree murder, for which he was sentenced to hard labor for 30 years and life imprisonment, respectively. But an appeal against the conviction filed by a second public defender raised serious questions about Garraway's handling of the case.

Keene claims that he had asked to plead guilty to manslaughter, which could have resulted in a shorter sentence, but Garraway had not allowed it.

"I wish I had the money to pay for a lawyer like the other guy," he says by email.

A Louisiana defense lawyer who reviewed the case for me shared this opinion: "Only an idiot would have gone to trial without considering other options." Speaking on condition of anonymity, this lawyer said the case was mishandled in such a way as to make one think that the original defense attorney was "drunk, incompetent, or receiving kickbacks."

The late D. Bert Garraway was a regular court-appointed attorney for the indigent accused, who had a rap sheet of his own. Convicted in 1988 of attempting to extort undercover federal agents on behalf of a client whose landfill site had been used as a chemical waste dump, he was disbarred for three months and sentenced to 300 hours of community service, which he completed as an attorney in the public defender's office. Upon fulfilling this requirement, Garraway continued working as a defense attorney.

ANGOLA
PRISON
RODEO

PHOTOS: TOP: JOE RAEDLE / GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM ROW: FRANK McMAINS

ANGOLA
PRISON
RODEO

Opposite him in the Keene trial was Baton Rouge district attorney Doug Moreau. A diehard, God-fearing Republican, a former Miami Dolphins tight end, and a longtime broadcaster for LSU football games, Moreau put more people on death row than anyone else in Louisiana during his 18-year tenure as DA. He sees his old job in simple terms: "A person would be on death row because of something he did. He's the one who started the process."

The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution states that "in all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right...to have the assistance of counsel for his defense." Two-and-a-quarter centuries later, millions of Americans lack proper legal representation.

In 2017, a report for the National Association of Criminal Justice Lawyers (titled "State of Crisis: Chronic Neglect and Underfunding for Louisiana's Public Defense System") asserted this about representation for people without means accused of crimes in Keene's state: "The gravity of the situation there will require a concerted, sustained national effort to alleviate it. The widespread injustice faced by poor people in Louisiana's courts, a disproportionate number of them people of color, demands the attention of everyone concerned about human dignity and fundamental rights."

Statewide, public defense offices have blamed funding shortfalls on a drop in revenue from traffic violations. The claim is understandable. In Louisiana, these offices are primarily financed by traffic tickets and court fines, and traffic tickets have fallen 35 percent in ten years.

The dearth of funds means fewer lawyers and more cases per lawyer. Increased caseloads mean slower processing times, and increased backlogs of criminal cases mean more pretrial clients being held in jail, at a cost that is—at around $55 a day—greater than what would be required to adequately fund a defense.

And if that wasn't bad enough, lawyers often have to double as their own support staff, doing duty as social workers and in-house investigators that Louisiana is also shamefully short of.

■■■

"I LOVE it, I love it," says Bubba Dunn of Angola Prison's controversial, bleacher-packing spectacle.

Dunn—a former professional rodeo rider—serves as the stock contractor for the spring and autumn event. "It's an old-time rodeo. Reminds me of how it used to be. Man versus beast. That's why people come here. Nobody wants to see anyone get killed, but they damn sure don't want to miss a good wreck. And the riders, they go for it because if they make money, they'll have money for the canteen and they'll get to buy their own clothes—not just wear prison-issue."

The rodeo, which has been running since 1964, brings in around $450K during its April weekend. It is a source of pride for anyone connected with it. Angola officials see it as a tool of rehabilitation and are happy to cite reduced prison-violence numbers as proof of its efficacy. The rodeo helps pay for a raft of educational programs, re-entry training in such certified trades as auto repair or air-conditioner installation, and recreational supplies.

Inmates look forward to the event and associated Hobbycraft Fair, as it's called. The rodeo and marketplace bring prisoners that brief taste of freedom. And they can make real money. They get to keep 85 percent of any Hobbycraft profits, with the rest going to the Inmate Welfare Fund, and state and local taxes. Cash prizes up to $500 are awarded to winners of the rodeo events. And then there's the prestige that goes with winning the custom belt buckle if a rider is crowned the rodeo's "All-Around Cowboy."

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On the other hand, there are the injuries, and the fact that spectators assemble in the thousands to watch incarcerated amateur participants, the majority serving life sentences, get thrown off bulls and broncos, as weekend entertainment. Convict-cowboys regularly break bones, or get lacerated by a bull's horns. One rider in the 1970s, shaken by an enraged bull after a fall, spent the rest of his prison life as a quadriplegic.

There's also the way the rodeo has a way of fortifying racial and socioeconomic stereotypes. African-American riders, riders from disadvantaged backgrounds, appear as, yes, human pinballs in a public arena to provide viewing enjoyment for a paying audience—a crowd whose racial mix roughly reverses that of the prison. The audience is predominantly white.

Some label the rodeo barbaric. Others argue that it has time-tested value—proven benefits—both for the prison population and for the way the prison operates as a whole.

Angola administrators vigorously defend their event in the face of criticism, which comes from observers both within Louisiana and nationally. One of those observers is Ashley Nellis of the Sentencing Project, a justice reform advocacy group. Says Nellis: "Prisoners benefit from being able to earn a little money. That's a wonderful thing, but it's not really a skill. [The rodeo] makes them feel connected to the community, but at the same time it reinforces our tendency to assume the violent nature of prisoners."

Incarceration is said to serve four purposes: deterrence, incapacitation, retribution, and rehabilitation. Redemption is a different matter. Whatever a prisoner's good works—his long hours of farm toil and artistic output—there's little hope of redemption for

PHOTO: WILLIAM WIDMER / GETTY IMAGES

him in Angola Prison without Christ. The federally funded Baptist seminary program, which was started by Burl Cain in 1995, offers four-year college degrees in ministry, including instruction in Greek and Hebrew, as well as preaching. The students are usually lifers, and the assumption is that they will help other prisoners work through the issues that led them to commit crimes.

Cain is quoted by Texas state senator John Whitmire, a Democrat who has run the senate's criminal justice committee for years, as saying: "With a moral attitude, even if an inmate will not be set free in this world, he looks forward to being free in the next." Whitmire was impressed by the Angola program, and pushed the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to create its own seminary. There are now similar prison seminary programs in Mississippi, Georgia, New Mexico, Michigan, and West Virginia.

■■■

LEGEND has it that when Harry Whittington of the Texas Board of Corrections—the man who years later was shot by then-Vice President Dick Cheney while hunting quail—voted to abolish the state's prison rodeo at Huntsville, a Lone Star flag behind him fell to the ground.

Earlier this year, Representative Ernest Bailes introduced a bill to reinstate the Huntsville rodeo, where Johnny Cash performed his first prison concert in 1956. This rodeo, which had taken place every Sunday in October for 55 years, ended in 1986 in part because its stadium was past the point of affordable repair. Making the case for a revival, Representative Bailes said, "Profits from the rodeo ticket sales alone would help fund education, recreation, and medical programs for inmates across Texas, as it did for so many years before."

If we can judge a society by its prisons, the fact that officials in both Texas and neighboring Oklahoma want their prison rodeos to make a comeback tells us a lot.

Prison system budget issues late last century led to the demise of all but Angola's rodeo, with insufficient funds available for infrastructure improvement and to pay staff to run the events. Meanwhile, in multiple prison systems, funding can now be found for religious training and the promotion of a narrow band of cultural values. And a couple states are weighing a return to an event where, like at Angola, prisoners would sing for their bland supper, and provide a spectacle, complete with chances for blood, concussions, and broken bones, to the paying public.

■■■

ON that April Sunday at the prison rodeo, Pinball—an event with a $250 top prize—takes a turn for the ugly when a pair of prisoners get smashed by the bull and can barely move. They are helped out of the ring without fanfare, however, because Convict Poker is up next, and that's always a crowd favorite.

In Convict Poker, four helmeted inmates sit at a small table as if playing cards, only to be rudely interrupted by a raging bull, which invariably sends the entire setup skyward. On this occasion, one inmate is catapulted into the air and lands in a worryingly crumpled heap. The dirt ring fills with several comrades trying to distract the bull in case it decides to add a trampling to the man's woes.

Arguably, the main event of the festivities is Guts & Glory. It's the biggest deal for the participating inmates anyway, because of the substantial prize money. A red poker chip is tied to the head of Angola's angriest Brahma bull, which is then released into the arena. Prisoners compete to grab the chip and avoid getting battered or gored by the 2,000-pound beast in the process. Whoever retrieves the chip, if anyone, wins $500 in cash.

Six weeks after that April installment of Guts & Glory, and the other rodeo events, I receive an email from Joe Keene. Referring to his Bust Out ride, he writes, "I fell wrong and broke my collarbone and messed up my shoulder. I can still feel the bones moving where they shouldn't be. They are talking about having to put a plate inside of me."

In spite of his tumble, Keene scored well, notching a 78.5 on a hard ride, though it wasn't enough to win. He tried to get back in the ring, to compete in another event, only to be told by medical personnel that he was too injured to continue.

Losing his crown as Bust Out champion hurts him more than any physical injury could, though these days, pain of one sort or another is simply a constant. "I am dead but alive," Keene says, speaking of life without parole. "But that's the hand that life has dealt me and so many others."

The only thing that would mitigate his pain is forgiveness, but the forgiveness Keene craves is in the hands of very few people—his mother, his father, and his victim—and they are all dead. He would like to forgive himself, but he needs to be shown how. Until then, there's the next rodeo, and the next, and the one after that.

(Note: The names of two Angola inmates have been changed in this article.)

Elle Hardy is a writer currently based in the American South. She hails from Australia and has reported from places like North Korea and Turkmenistan.

NAOMI SWANN

OUR September Penthouse Pet of the Month, Naomi Swann, is more than just a pretty face and a rockin' bod. This brainy beauty has studied environmental science in college and plans to continue hitting the books. But with her elegant looks, we say she's already got plenty of class!

AGE: 20 • HEIGHT: 5'3" • MEASUREMENTS: 32A-23-33
HOMETOWN: ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

PHOTOGRAPHY
MS. SANDS

On what she does during her days off…
"My favorite thing to do in my spare time is Rollerblade. I also enjoy reading nonfiction, yoga, and lying in the sun."

On her favorite sexy movie moment…
"Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in *Ghost*. I personally have a hand fetish, and the scene starts with some dirty, sensual pottery work leading into hot, intimate sex. The music playing in the background is 'Unchained Melody' by the Righteous Brothers, and I love a good older, sensual song."

On her pet peeves…
"When people are obviously being insincere, and when people stop walking, or stop and turn around, in the middle of a crowd."

On her biggest turn-off…
"Lack of eye contact. I need that intimacy or sex is not even worth it to me."

On what drives her wild in bed…
"Being choked, hard eye contact, and dirty talk right in my ear! But I'm always up for anything spontaneous and thrilling."

On her favorite sex position…
"Missionary with one leg over the shoulder. It's perfect. Having the leg up allows for deeper penetration and being in missionary lets him keep eye contact and rub my clit."

On her ideal partner…
"Someone I can be super romantic and sexual with, but also someone who's fun. I need them to be neat and care about their appearance. I want to be able to have long, serious conversations about things that are important. They should also be observant and be a sincere listener."

On her favorite way to relax…
"Reading in a hammock by the water or in the mountains."

SHARE THE LOVE

Did you just have the wildest night of your life? Did your greatest fantasy come true? Or did you spy the sensual goings-on of other uninhibited adventurers.

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E-mail your torrid tales to **Letters@Penthouse.com**

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PENTHOUSE®

SEPTEMBER 2019 PET OF THE MONTH

Naomi Swann

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OCTOBER 2019 PET OF THE MONTH

Liv Wild

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LIV WILD

OUR October Penthouse Pet of the Month, Liv Wild, takes her name seriously. This naughty minx said she once screwed a cop to get out trouble and used to jump on and off moving trains just for the rush! But these days she gets her thrills from performing in front of a camera. Lucky us.

AGE: 20 • HEIGHT: 5'2" • MEASUREMENTS: 36C-27-37
HOMETOWN: POMPANO BEACH, FLORIDA

PHOTOGRAPHY
MS. SANDS

On the most exciting places she's ever had sex...
"In a botanical garden at dusk and pushed up against a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking a busy street."

On why she became a model and performer...
"I wanted to push myself and grow. I'm very introverted and shy. I figured putting myself raw and exposed on camera for the world to see would force me to come out of my shell. It has—and I love it!"

On her biggest pet peeves...
"Lies, pushy people, snobs, fake flowers, and people telling me what to do."

On when she's happiest...
"When I feel cared about, like when I'm with my best friend."

On her biggest turn-offs...
"I can't stand big egos and men who want head but don't want to eat me out."

On her dating deal breakers...
"A guy who thinks he knows what's best for me and tries to tell me what to do. Or someone with no future who thinks I'm going to take care of him financially."

On her ideal man...
"I prefer someone who's confident, honest, and has a sense of humor. But he can't be needy or clingy. He should love to give affection. But he should also take care of himself and have goals he's working toward."

On what drives her wild in bed...
"Good chemistry. Hot sex with a guy who wants me to come as much as I want him to come."

On what gets her in trouble...
"I'm mischievous. I like to push people's buttons."

WHEN GOD MADE MAN SHE WAS ONLY JOKING
Polaroid
Sun600
LMS

RYAN CALDERON

When Ryan Calderon's friend asked him to take photos of models for his clothing shop, he never imagined the request would help turn his hobby into a successful career. Ten years and 200K Instagram followers later, Calderon is now one of the hottest photographers working in L.A.

WHEN GOD
MADE MAN
SHE WAS
ONLY JOKING

Polaroid
LIGHT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
Sun600
LMS

TEN YEARS AGO, Ryan Calderon picked up a camera to help his friend with a photo shoot for his clothing store. From there, it didn't take long for the self-taught photographer's style of capturing and editing images of beautiful women to get noticed, and the models he was shooting started referring him to their friends in other industries.

These days, Calderon's seductive shots have amassed over 200K Instagram followers (@ryan__calderon) and comprise an impressive portfolio that features some of the adult industry's biggest players.

While Calderon grew up and currently lives in the beach town of Santa Barbara, he frequently travels to Los Angeles for work. He says he rarely shoots in the same place twice, and prefers locations with "raw beauty," such as deserts, or basic indoor settings. "I like that 'at home just lounging around' feel if I'm shooting inside."

The photographer's signature style is all about catching intimate moments and recreating visuals the way the mind would, and he's a master of the crop and unconventional angles. "For example," Calderon explains, "when you think back on an amazing night with a wild one, your mind will break the moment down scene by scene, and the smallest details come to life like snapshots. You can be sitting at work and, all of a sudden, an image of those lips is in your head. Just the lips. I try to replicate the thoughts you can't erase."

Calderon counts both movies and history as inspiration, and will often base a shoot around something he found in a thrift store. He also keeps an arsenal of random objects at home for when the right model comes along. "I always have several ideas in the tomb for months, even years, just waiting for the stars to align," he says.

His advice for young photographers? "What I've learned is not to take things too seriously. Don't get anxious about when things are going to happen, just have fun taking advantage of the opportunities that will eventually come."

AUTO REVERSE
TOSHIBA
REVERSE MODE
AUTO REVERSE
SOFT TOUCH OPERATION

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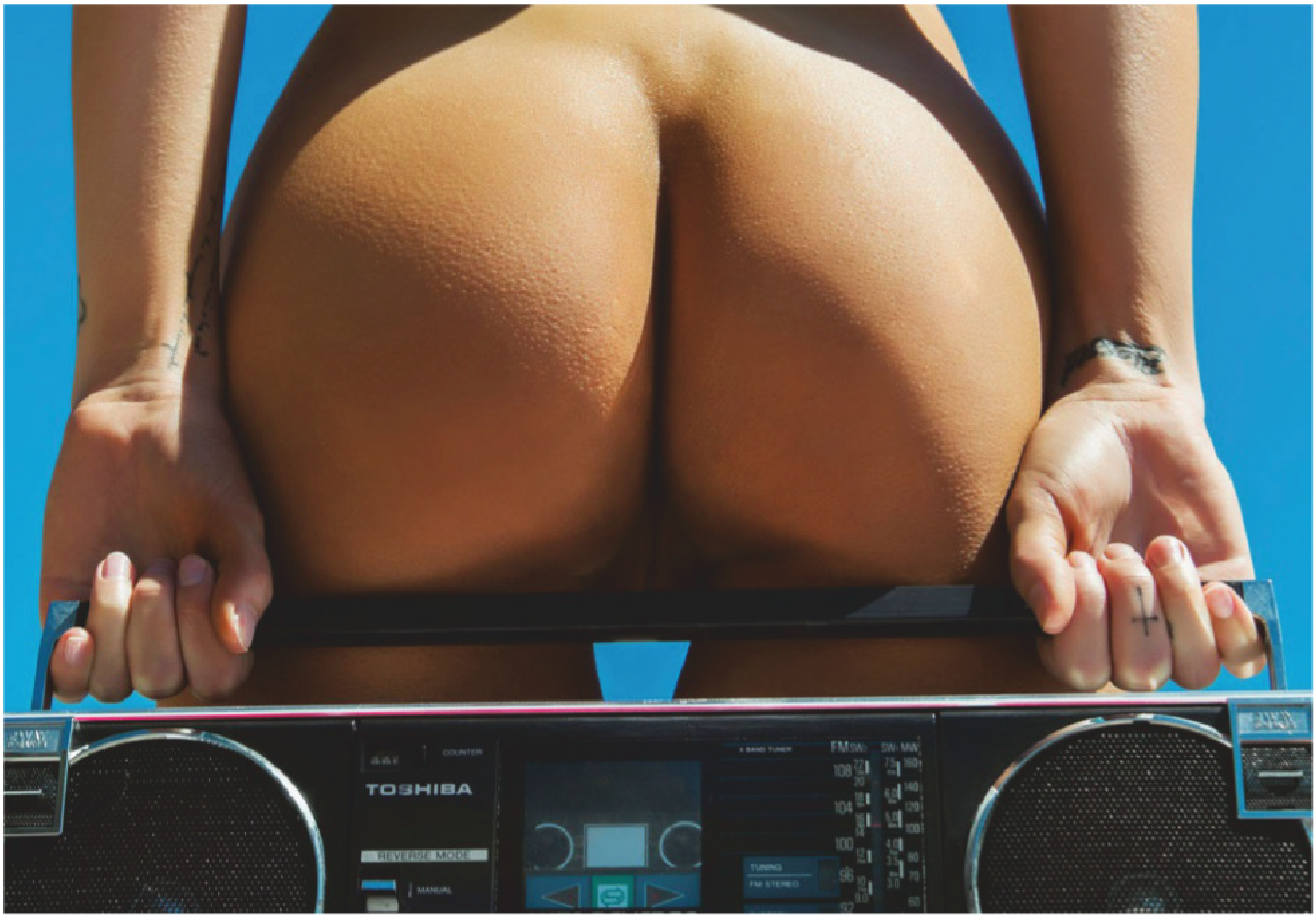

TOSHIBA
REVERSE MODE

THE MUSE

Skye Blue

FREE-SPIRITED Skye Blue wanders wherever her heart takes her. But this bewitching beauty always lets her luminous looks shine, making her the ultimate artist's inspiration.

PHOTOGRAPHY
HOLLY RANDALL

27

FEATURE

THE CRYING OF GILGO BEACH

Will website detectives help crack the Long Island Serial Killer case?

BY SHANE CASHMAN

I WAS once told by a woman who calls herself a witch that I was a prostitute in a past life—or, rather, in her own words: *a woman of ill repute*. I'm not normally one to put stock in this kind of thing, but when she told me that, I didn't have to engage in a lot of mental gymnastics for it to make a strange sort of sense.

The woman's words came back to me when I found myself compelled to investigate the unsolved murders of sex workers whose remains were discovered lined up along a lonely beach-town road. There were times it did feel like a past life had hijacked my brain, convincing me to fall in with an internet crowd trying to solve the Long Island Serial Killer case.

These sleuths are stay-at-home moms, taxi drivers, psychics, people on bed rest, bankers, and even a former Las Vegas haunted-house employee—dedicated amateurs who've spent years scouring the internet, looking for anything the authorities might have missed, anything that could lead to the capture of a canny killer believed to have been operating in the shadows for 20 years.

Early on, I told myself I wouldn't become a desktop detective. I rationalized the time and energy I began directing toward this mystery by classifying my interest as basic human curiosity—I just wanted to know who these people, these keyboard Sherlocks, were. It seemed worth looking into, journalistically—a varied group of Americans attaching themselves to a notorious serial-murder case.

And yet here I am, one cold January day, walking the shoulder of Ocean Parkway on a desolate barrier island off Long Island's southern shore. I'm following a video map I found on YouTube, one that traces the steps of the killer, who used this stretch of road as a secret graveyard. The map shows where the perpetrator is believed to have carried his victims' bodies, wrapped in burlap sacks, from a car and dumped them in bramble, mere feet from the road's edge.

I'm following a video map I found on YouTube, one that traces the steps of the killer, who used this stretch of road as a secret graveyard.

* * *

NO ONE knew a killer had been depositing bodies and body parts in the South Shore region of Long Island when Shannan Gilbert went missing in the predawn gloom of May 1, 2010.

Shannan, a 24-year-old escort from Jersey City, New Jersey, had advertised her services on Craigslist. She'd arrived at her client Joseph Brewer's house in Oak Beach, a small, gated community off Ocean Parkway. But something inside Brewer's house freaked her out, and she called 911. Although police have not released the 911 tape, her mother, Mari Gilbert, heard portions. She says her daughter was screaming, "They're trying to kill me!" *They* could refer to Brewer and Shannan's driver, Michael Pak—but Suffolk County police have cleared both men. Investigators claim she sounded psychotic—possibly a reaction to drugs. She bolted from the house, away from the two men, banged on neighbors' doors, and vanished.

After weeks of nothing, the search for Shannan slowed down. Her family accused the police of not trying hard enough to find her because she was...*just a hooker.*

Then, on December 11, 2010, police officer John Mallia and his cadaver dog, Blue, were training on Ocean Parkway, near Gilgo Beach, minutes from where Shannan was last seen, when Blue found a woman's skeletal remains. They turned out to be the remains of Melissa Barthelemy, another escort who advertised on Craigslist and had been missing for a year.

Mallia and his dog would later find the bodies of three more young women placed only hundreds of feet apart on Gilgo Beach. Each of them had been strangled and started to decompose at another location—a pattern that has been linked to serial killers who engage in necrophilia. Like Barthelemy, these women were found inside burlap sacks. The victims were Amber Lynn Costello, 27, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, 25, and Megan Waterman, 22.

Using a search party of cadaver dogs, divers, and helicopters, Suffolk County PD would go on to find the corpses or body parts of six more people scattered along Ocean Parkway. Some of the remains discovered at Gilgo Beach turned out be genetic matches for body parts found 20 years earlier elsewhere on Long Island.

A pair of hands and a skull matched a mutilated torso found in Manorville, 40 miles east. A skull matched a pair of legs that had washed ashore on Fire Island in 1996. There was an Asian male, still unidentified, found in women's clothes. There was the corpse of an African-American toddler wrapped in a blanket whose DNA connected it to another corpse, the girl's mother, found a mile away.

Currently, there are more unidentified victims than those police have identified. After the additional discoveries, investigators struggled to establish whether this was the work of one killer or possibly more. A single-killer theory was easier to support back when all the victims were a similar type: petite, white escorts.

Police eventually found Shannan Gilbert a year later, in nearby wetlands off the road, badly decomposed. Her death was ruled an accidental drowning—overexposure to the elements having weakened her until she collapsed.

Still convinced she'd been in a drug-induced episode, police suggested she ran through the marsh, disoriented. The Suffolk County PD does not include her as one of the victims of the serial killer—something Shannan's family struggles with. On the one hand, they hope she wasn't murdered. On the other, is it really just a coincidence that a fifth woman, also a sex worker who advertised online, was found dead in a swamp near Gilgo Beach?

* * *

WHEN asked if police were taking this serial murder case seriously enough, former Suffolk County police commissioner Richard Dormer, who worked the case until he retired, made a point of saying he hung the photos of these young women in his office.

"They look like your neighbors," Dormer stated. "Nobody deserves to have their life snuffed out. Police departments everywhere take murder very seriously. Doesn't matter the occupation of the victim—if you were murdered, we're obligated to represent that person."

But Lorraine Ela, mother of Megan Waterman, says she's convinced the cops have put her daughter's case on the back burner. "This is too big a case for Suffolk County to handle," Ela tells me, and notes that she rarely hears from police anymore. For a time, in 2015, when the FBI began assisting and Suffolk County got a

PHOTO: JACOB_09 / SHUTTERSTOCK

new police commissioner, Ela was hopeful there'd be increased action on the case. But her phone has since stopped ringing.

This silence is one reason Ela and family members of other victims turned to case websites and desktop detectives for support, updates, and possible leads, however unofficial.

■■■

THE first place I find extensive, user-gathered information regarding the case is the YouTube channel of Gray Hughes. He made the video-map I used to navigate Ocean Parkway. When Hughes reads about a crime scene, he logs onto Google Earth and drops a pin. He often then replicates the scene and its physical setting with a program like 3D Studio Max and posts the video for user analysis.

When it comes to the Long Island Serial Killer case, Hughes is trying to provide a resource that can help people visualize the crime scene. He hopes it might trigger a memory in someone who has been through the area, perhaps a beachgoer, someone who might have seen something suspicious.

"I feel like it gives the viewer a better feel for the location," Hughes tells me.

It does exactly that. His Google Earth video's point-of-view is one of a person standing on the shoulder of Ocean Parkway—the same view the killer might have had after pulling over with a body in the car. Hughes' video pans slowly left to right, scanning the barren landscape. During winter, with the beaches deserted, Ocean Parkway is so isolated it's not hard to believe a killer could dispose of a body, or bodies, even in broad daylight.

■■■

PARANOIA comes naturally to people in the online amateur-detective world. It's what happens when you immerse yourself in dark details, labyrinthine theories, and rosters of potential murder suspects in unsolved serial murder cases—cases where the killer might still be at large, and perhaps reading your latest website post.

Fear has both fostered and destroyed relationships in this digital community. It's a subculture of distrust, anxiety, and information. It's a realm rife with clues and red herrings, do-gooders and trolls. It's hard to get people's real names.

"Zero," for example, was suspicious of me from the start.

"I'm a little curious about you," he tells me online. "Your questions are so specific. I'm wondering if there is more to why you are looking into all this." I tell him he can google me. Or check my Facebook. I assure him I'm a real person.

Zero responds, "I say this kind of thing to everyone."

He has his reasons for wondering if I am legit. After he began posting about the Long Island Serial Killer, aka LISK, in 2013, he was targeted by trolls. His website, liskdotcom.wordpress.com (still online but rendered inactive in 2014), is both a museum of factual evidence and an archive of paranoia-tinged comments.

All the case theories are here, from a police cover-up to demon worshippers, from snuff films to the sex-and-death orgies of millionaires. Zero's own emails arrive jammed with giant blocks of information. He helps me try to get a grip on this vast chaos of truth and fiction, evidence and fantasy. He's preserved hundreds of emails between him and others (persons of interest, possible witnesses, fellow desktop detectives, victims' families), as well as screenshots of almost any online mention of this enduring mystery.

Zero's site was part of a second wave dedicated to the case, succeeding the now-defunct LongIslandSerialKiller.com, which went live in the days after the first bodies were found. That site got substantial traffic from amateur sleuths, family members of victims, and Long Island residents unsettled by the notion that a serial killer might still be out there, poised to dump another body.

But the site's chat room also became a place of slander, wild rumors, and trolling. People accused fellow visitors of being the killer. Everyone I've spoken to about LongIslandSerialKiller.com believes the killer himself not only visited the website, but might have posted. Anxiety escalated. Certain commenters banded together out of fear the killer was stalking them—even if they lived in different states, hundreds of miles away.

The site's founder, overwhelmed, eventually shut it down. But new websites popped up. One of these, Catching LISK, created by MysteryMom7, captured the founder's growing paranoia. At one point, MysteryMom7 thought the killer had sent a drone to spy on her. She claimed it crashed in her backyard.

Two camps would come to frequent Zero's own site. There were those working to unlock the mystery, and those pushing wild conspiracies. In the first camp was a woman named Linda. Bedridden after an accident, she became engrossed with the case's complexities. Linda and Zero made it a goal to keep the conspiracy camp from spreading misinformation to the victims' families. Zero spoke with Shannan's mother, Mari, and offered to make sure certain people weren't "in her ear."

Understandably, Mari pursued any shred of possible hope, and cast a wide net in seeking help. She contacted people like Jerrie Dean, founder of Missing Persons of America. Dean has compiled an almost Bible-size list of missing people. Some entries date so far back, the victims were last seen on stagecoaches.

Dean told me the same thing she told Mari: She thinks something set Shannan off in the house, which led to a dissociative break. She believes Shannan's death was accidental. However, she also believes former Suffolk County police chief James Burke was, in her words, "lazy," and "didn't care about [those young women]." (Reader, put a pin in Burke's name.)

■■■

ACCORDING to people posting on the internet, the Long Island Serial Killer is a clean-cut sociopath, a shoe freak with a nice car, a wife, and kids. He's a South Shore local, religious, bisexual, well-spoken. He's a doctor and periodic drunk. He's a bald narcissist. He's corporate and charming. He's a fisherman with a truck. He's a small-town cop who keeps corpses for sex. He's a transient, blue-collar, 50-year-old white male. He's a depraved sadomasochist who summers on the shore.

The internet has put forth various persons of interest. There's Joseph Brewer, the john. There's Michael Pak, Shannan's driver the night she disappeared. There's someone known as "The Drifter"—a man who claims to have partied with Brewer and even self-published a "fictionalized autobiography," detailing the supposed drug-fueled prostitution parties at Brewer's house.

Rooted deep in the online discussion is the notion of a possible police cover-up. This theory began with the fact that the killer used Melissa Barthelemy's cell phone to call and taunt her teenage sister. The sister, Amanda, received several phone calls from a calm-sounding man telling her that Melissa was a whore and that he was "watching her rot." Some desktop detectives believe the killer is somehow connected with law enforcement because during these disturbing calls, he'd hang up just before the call could be traced. When police were able to ping the phone's general location, it turned out the killer had placed the calls from crowded places like Times Square or Madison Square Garden. Former police commissioner Richard Dormer dismisses this theory. He says anyone who's seen some cop shows knows that tracing protocol.

But there's also James Burke, onetime Suffolk County police chief. In 2015, Burke was arrested for beating up a young man who stole a canvas bag containing pornography and sex toys from Burke's SUV. The beating happened while the thief was shackled at a county police station. Burke went on to cover up the assault, and eventually pleaded guilty to obstruction of justice and violating the man's civil rights.

Burke's past is fodder for conspiracy theorists who accuse him of mishandling the LISK case—and maybe even being the killer himself. Back when Burke was a sergeant, he was caught having sex with a drug dealer and prostitute. Even still, he rose to become police chief. Moreover, when Burke was a teen, he testified in court against his friends, whom he watched beat a 13-year-old Smithtown boy to death in the woods and stuff rocks into his mouth. They wonder about Burke's account of the murder.

The theory that would take firmest hold on websites fingered Dr. Charles Peter Hackett. For years, Hackett was an Oak Beach resident: a middle-aged, overweight man with a prosthetic leg. A group of commenters worked hard to build a link between the doctor and the death of Shannan Gilbert. Hackett became the internet's top person of interest after Mari said Hackett called her in the days after Shannan went missing. Hackett, Mari said, uttered something very strange, saying he ran a "home for wayward girls." Though Hackett denied all this and claimed he never hosted Shannan, phone records confirm he did in fact call Mari.

■■■

A PAST trauma in Zero's life might help account for his obsessive drive to illuminate this case. When he was 16, living in California, his best friend's mom was killed by William Suff, aka the Riverside Prostitute Killer, convicted of murdering 12 women and suspected of many more slayings. When Suff's photo appeared on television, Zero said his friend recognized him immediately.

Zero used to work at the Fright Dome in Las Vegas, a haunted house. His character had long scraggly hair, a ghoulish, blood-smeared face, and a Manson Family "X" on his forehead. It might be tempting to label Zero a morbid person, drawn to horror, and conclude that's what led him to the LISK case. But from what I gleaned, Zero truly does want justice for the victims. He's seen firsthand the destructive aftermath of a serial killer's crimes.

When not entertaining every data speck, Zero also has had to deal with those trolls, and face some bizarre accusations, like "devil worship." He had his name posted on websites and victim-memorial pages, with commenters suggesting he might be the killer himself. Some of this stuff began with a person I'll call Money, who would also accuse her ex-husband of the murders.

Money claimed to be working with the FBI. Zero didn't think she was a real person at first—just a troll with an alias. But it turned out she used her real name, worked at a bank, and Zero called her once. What really pissed him off was how normal she sounded. He says she believed she was sincerely helping the case.

Zero tells me Money and MysteryMom7 eventually joined forces.

"I contacted Long Island Homicide once, because they insisted I was endangering *them,*" he says. Money's case theories are twisty and kooky, connecting everyone from James Burke to Zero to Hackett to the actor Michael Fassbender.

Ocean Parkway

Paranoia comes naturally to people in the online amateur detective world. It's what happens when you immerse yourself in dark details and labyrinthine theories.

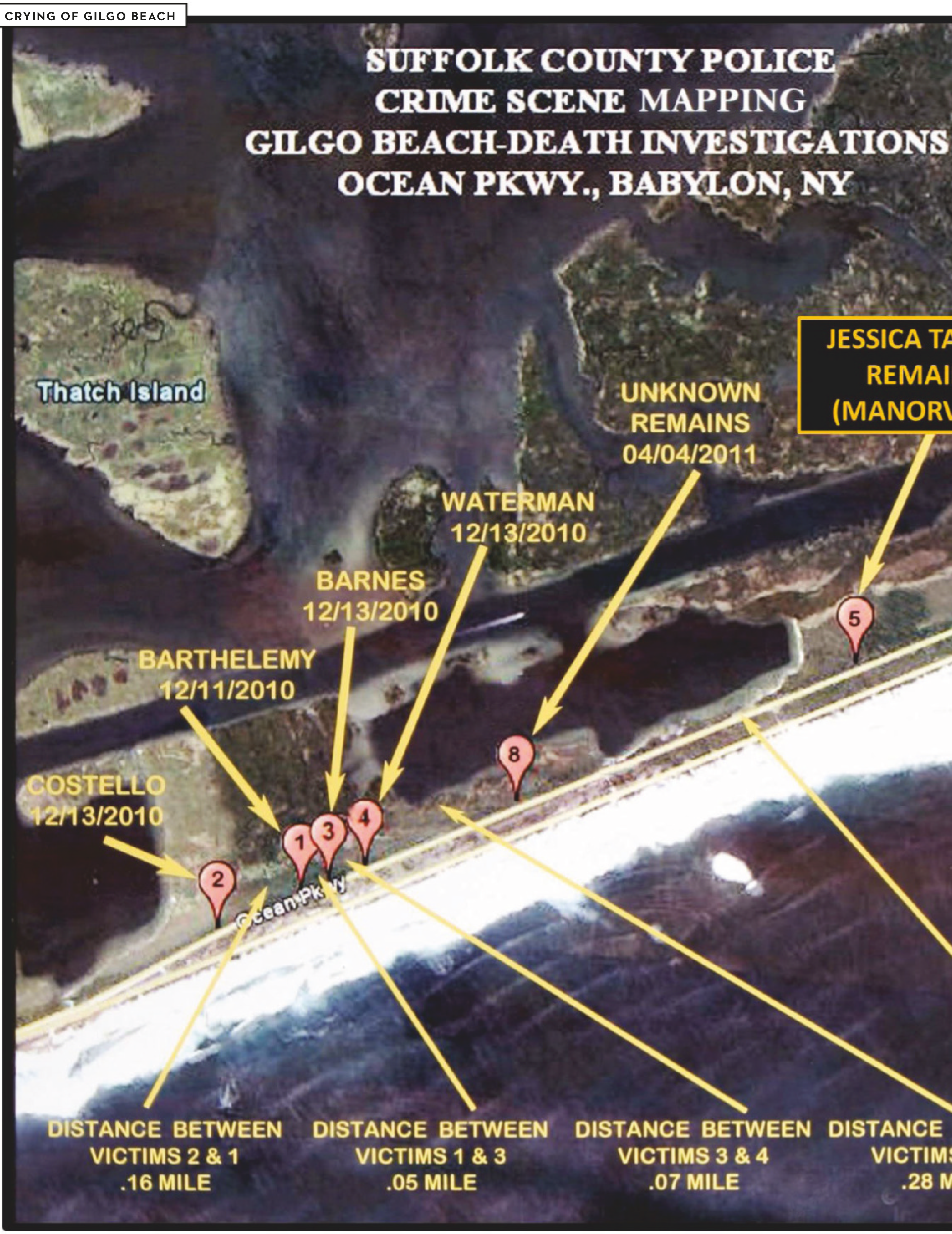
Money commented extensively on Zero's site and Facebook memorial pages. She highlighted a group of men known as the Carney Construction Crew, or CCC, whom she alleged kill women for sport. She claimed her ex-husband and Hackett were CCC members. At first, Zero and others dismissed this stuff, like they'd rejected her Satanism theories. But then Zero and MysteryMom7 began receiving vague, spooky threats on their websites.

Zero shows me some visitor comments, the first by "Teps."

> *Teps*: Disregard everything said about the CCC. All falsification and wishful thinking. Go about your regular business and leave the CCC out of this.
>
> *Lightweight*: CCC got no beef with you. Why you dragging CCC through the mud?
>
> *452inLondon*: Carney Construction Crew after you? Do not take any chances. Shut down this website.... Take it to the pavement where it is more private.

To me, the comments read like the words of cartoon villains. They could have been typed by anybody. Zero, though, eventually came to think there might be something to the CCC. And he tells me to visit the site Websleuths for more.

As my time in Zero's orbit nears its end, he says he's dealing with another troll. A person claims to have seen a body dumped off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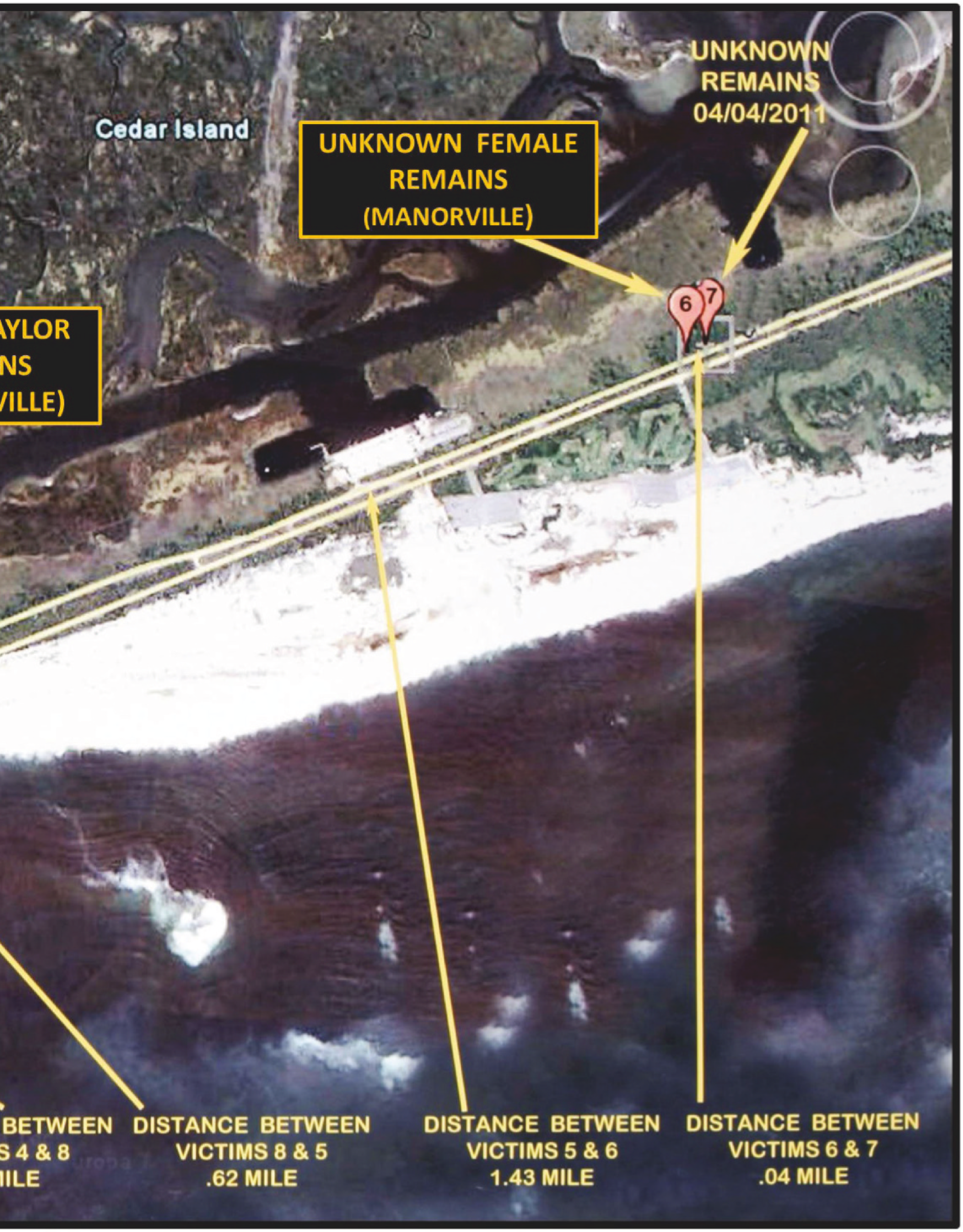
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DISTANCE BETWEEN VICTIMS 6 & 7 .04 MILE

Ocean Parkway in June 2010.

"It was 2 A.M. and pitch-dark," the supposed witness states. He claims he met with then-police chief James Burke on Ocean Parkway to show him the location, but Burke didn't take him seriously because he dresses like a metalhead. He'd like to talk to the FBI, he says, but worries about his personal safety.

"It's my fault for engaging these people," Zero tells me.

I ask him if he ever thinks he's just talking to the same person the whole time.

"My wife told me that at the very beginning," Zero responds. "That's probably why I hit it so hard at first, like I did with you, to see if these people are real."

■■■

WHEN Tricia Griffith became a mother, she spent more time at home than she had in years. It was the late nineties. The JonBenét Ramsey case dominated the news—that still unsolved case of the 6-year-old beauty queen who'd been found murdered in her own basement on Christmas Day, 1996. Griffith turned to the internet, craving more than just TV and newspaper coverage.

She joined Websleuths in 1997. Back then, it was a small site created specifically to discuss the JonBenét mystery. Six years later, the founder of Websleuths called Griffith and said he was sick of running the site. "You can have it," he told her.

The site could be a snake pit at times, with antisocial commenters posting things like, "I'm gonna kill you." Other people, though, continued to have meaningful case discussions. Griffith banned a majority of those who did nothing but threaten one another. After the ban, naturally, she got plenty of death threats.

"The only reason we're heavily moderated is we want people to stay on topic and not be jerks," she tells me. I ask what her site's main purpose is when it comes to the LISK case.

"It's everything," Griffith replies. "If we can help identify the bodies, that would be wonderful. Those victims didn't want to end up in some swamp. They deserve to be treated like real victims. Some people these days just go, 'Oh well, it's a hooker.'"

Websleuths uses NamUs.gov—the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System—a site run by the National Institute of Justice where citizens can view evidence to try and help authorities locate missing people and identify bodies. When it comes to the Gilgo Beach victims, identification could produce a major break in the case. It could help authorities begin to trace back the last moments of that person's life and possibly lead to the killer.

I ask Griffith if she suspects Dr. Hackett, like others online.

"That's a tough one," she says. "Because he's a real person who is probably reading these things online. But damn, if there aren't a lot of big questions. Here is the dilemma—some people think he's the killer, some don't. Either way, his whole life has been turned upside down. If he's not involved, that's a horrible tragedy. But if he is involved, it was people on the internet who figured it out."

Websleuths helped solve a murder case in 2009. Abraham Shakespeare, a Florida man, won $32 million in the lottery. Then he disappeared. Up popped a woman, Dee Dee Moore, who claimed to have power of attorney over his affairs. She told Shakespeare's friends that he "just needed to get away." Moore moved into his new house and took all his money. Automatically, she became a suspect.

"So we started discussing her on Websleuths," Griffith tells me. And they discovered that before Shakespeare's disappearance, Dee Dee Moore filed for bankruptcy. Then Moore herself showed

"I think the killer's graveyard extends from Queens to the Hamptons.... I think he's got way more victims than the police want you to believe."

Suffolk County Police investigate the scene on the side of the Ocean Parkway

PHOTO:WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

up on the website and started defending herself.

"The more she talked, she just dug herself a huge hole," Griffith says. "The police contacted me and said, 'Just let her talk—please don't edit anything she says.' So we let her run wild. Then she tried to deny that it was her [commenting on our site]."

Not long after, the body of Abraham Shakespeare was found underneath Dee Dee Moore's boyfriend's garage. Eventually, she was convicted of murder. "That was the one time we did have a killer on the forum posting," Griffith says.

■■■

A WEBSLEUTHS member who goes by LindsayLohan6 keeps a list of unidentified bodies found throughout Long Island. Many of them have been mutilated, dismembered, stuffed in suitcases, found in bins, or discarded along roadsides. These bodies have never been officially connected to LISK, but LindsayLohan6 thinks they're all victims of the same killer.

"I think the killer's graveyard extends from Queens to the Hamptons," she tells me. "Bodies and bones have been turning up along the barrier islands over the last 20 years. I think he's got way more victims than the police want you to believe. Ridgway numbers probably." The reference is to Gary Ridgway, the Green River Killer, convicted of 49 murders, many of them sex workers, killed in the eighties and nineties.

Grisly murders, prolific killers—Long Island has history in this regard. There was Joel Rifkin, who killed and dismembered as many as 17 prostitutes between 1989 and 1993. In 2014, Leah Cuevas killed and dismembered another woman, scattering her limbs and head in different Long Island towns. That same year, carpenter John Bittrolff, from Manorville, was arrested for the murders of two prostitutes in the early nineties and is suspected of killing a third. Following his 2017 convictions, Bittrolff became a suspect in the LISK case, but evidence so far hasn't linked him to Gilgo Beach.

"What's the deal with Long Island?" I ask LindsayLohan6.

"It's cursed," she replies. And she references a seventeenth-century massacre of Native Americans in Massapequa. According to legend, Captain John Underhill led an attack that killed more than a hundred tribal people. "It left a bad blood in the land," she says.

When I ask what gets her attention when it comes to the LISK case, she mentions a website devoted to johns reviewing sex workers. The Carney Construction Crew hang out there, and they have her suspicious. Let's call the site "Paradise."

I briefly wonder if I'm corresponding with Money—the user who told Zero she can connect actor Michael Fassbender to Gilgo Beach. I fear she's created a different screen name and is toying with me. I ask LindsayLohan6 if she knows Money.

"Of course I know Money," she replies, before disparaging her and calling everyone who entertains her theories "sock puppets," more concerned about causing drama than solving the case.

I follow LindsayLohan6 down a Paradise rabbit hole. She sends me a link to an old thread where CCC is kicking out one of their members, magicfingersny. Commenters trash him, and by thread's end he's banned from CCC and their online circle. They also make clear he's no longer welcome to join them at Shady Al's Exotic, a now-shuttered Smithtown biker bar/strip joint where this group of men allegedly hung out.

I see familiar screen names in the thread—Teps and Lightweight, two people who supposedly told Zero to back off. I also take note of a member who goes by the name Wolf, since Zero tells me that Money claims Wolf is her ex-husband.

Discussions on Paradise cover how to buy a burner phone, how to lie to police if you're pulled over with an escort, and baseball. But the main activity is rating sex workers on a 1-to-10 looks/attitude/service scale. If a woman is 3/8/10, that means she is "unattractive, but friendly with good sex." A 10/5/4 means "model material with a poor attitude and mediocre sex."

Site users call themselves "mongers," short for "whoremongers." They aren't johns, they contend, they're *hobbyists*—purchasing sex is their hobby. Their reviews detail whether encounters involve a mattress on the floor or a five-star hotel room. They appraise the taste and smell of women; whether the sex workers have all their teeth or exhibit track marks; how much English they know; if the photos in their ads match the real product; and if they offer DFK or PSE or GFE or HME (the abbreviations stand for deep French kissing, porn-star experience, girlfriend experience, and honeymoon experience).

Eventually I come across a thread that acts as a kind of eulogy for magicfingersny—he died while in exile from the CCC group. The members share stories about showing up to orgies with him and watching the guy, seventysomething, get naked.

I search the mongers' comments to see if anyone has referenced the LISK case. It doesn't seem unlikely that a group of men from Long Island who review escorts might talk about dead sex workers turning up in their area.

I find a thread titled "4 Bodies Found In LI," created after the first victims were discovered. It discusses whether any mongers would come forward if they recognized a victim. Some commenters say they recognize one of the women. Some say they'd come forward. Others insist they would never do so, since their name could go public. The thread shifts to a discussion about how the killer could get away with it and whether he's a monger himself:

> *muffdvr*: This guy is a cold calculating serial killer. I doubt he socializes here. He is probably a loner/loser just like Rifkin.
>
> *genius*: LI is really a small place and has a very good highway system. At 2 am there isn't any traffic. A 30-minute car ride, even if doing the speed limit, can put the point where they were killed anywhere from Queens to well into Suffolk County. Ocean Pkwy is very straight and you can see cars coming from very far away—be easy to dump a body w/o being seen.... IMHO—the girls were killed elsewhere.... It is easy to drive 20 miles in a half hour doing the speed limit late at night to that spot. That puts the murder scene just about anywhere—even Queens.

I click on genius's profile. He'd been a Paradise member since August 2002. Active daily. The comment about the killer driving to his dumping ground came from 2011.

Genius unnerves me. Thinking about what Zero once told me ("Comments are the most important thing"), I dig around for every comment genius has made on the site. I find a negative review. It's about a woman he picked up at a gas station. It was 5 P.M. on a weekday. She gets in his car, pulls her tube top down, and tells him to drive to the local cemetery for privacy. When they get there, they argue over the price of a blowjob. She wants $80. He offers $25.

> *genius*: She starts punching on the side of my head with one hand and tries to grab my car key from the ignition….

> So I deliver a punch to the side of her head and as she is kicking my door and screaming, I put her in a chokehold and squeeze. I tell her to calm down or I'm going to kill her. She can't answer as I have her windpipe cut off, but she calms down and I let go.
>
> The moderator replies: This story should be required reading for any of us who frequent the SW [street walker] strolls as you always gotta be careful with these whackjob crackwhores.
>
> Another user says: With that chokehold you had on her she almost passed out and died…. Now that would have been a great story—how you got rid of the body and had to explain to cops, friends, and family.
>
> *genius*: I could have easily killed her if I wanted. w/o her being able to do much about it and she knew it—knife or no knife, rush hour or not—just break her neck—she was about 90 lbs. and I am 180. She looked like she hadn't eaten in a while and I work out in the gym and eat right.

Genius's daily routine, according to the site, starts when he leaves home by 3 A.M., wife in bed, to find a streetwalker before work. He also buys sex on the way home or stops at the massage parlors he can trust. He enjoys sitting in parking lots with escorts, especially with traffic all around him. He hides a burner phone he uses to call escorts in the trunk of his car, and replaces it often.

Unable to stop myself, I message LindsayLohan6: *I think I found the Long Island Serial Killer.*

I send her links to genius's posts. Part of me knows I'm acting crazy, but I keep going. By now, my living room walls are completely covered in printouts and notes I've assembled in an attempt to connect every clue gathered. It's gruesome wallpaper. My very own Fright Dome. I taped it all up late one night in a kind of manic episode. I decided it was the only way to process everything.

LindsayLohan6 messages back: *He could def be the killer. It's gotta be him or someone who posts as much as him in my opinion. It's someone who visits prozzies as much as he does.*

My attempts to reach the owner and moderators of "Paradise" go unanswered or are deleted.

Why would a killer post on a public forum about something that could lead to his capture? Probably because he's not the killer. Just a bad human proud of his cruelty. That said, I could believe a cocky killer who has gotten away with murder for two decades might get off on the thrill of alluding to his crimes on a public site.

Tricia Griffith from Websleuths says the idea of the Paradise site sickens her. We talk on the phone while we look at it together.

"Isn't it weird that we have access to this?" she says. "That we might be reading the actual killer's words? It's creepy."

I'm not sure if she is really buying into my theory, or if she's just good at humoring people who think they've found some case-breaking clue on the internet—people she has experience with.

She tells me a law requires you to list if you own a domain name.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the site's server is overseas. Like in Gibraltar." She looks into it. "It's like I thought," she says. "It's registered with a company to protect the owner's privacy."

She sends me the "company" name: IB4 Media. When I type their address into Google Earth, the satellite image just hovers over New Jersey, pinpointing no specific location.

I reach out to Gray Hughes to see if he can make anything of the address. He manages to learn that it's just a firehouse in Freehold, New Jersey.

In the morning, I call IB4 from a pay phone. The phone number's fake. Why am I even doing this? What am I expecting to find? I actually catch myself looking over my shoulder.

I fear all my time spent rooting around the gutters of the internet has got me sliding into madness. I wonder if the Paradise moderators have pinned my IP address. I've taken screenshots of the violence mentioned in site reviews. Have authorities checked this website? Was Money right all along? I reach out to Zero and tell him I've been talking to LindsayLohan6. He points out something I didn't notice. LindsayLohan6, LL6, is one letter and one number below MM7—MysteryMom7. He's not sure who LL6 is, if it is even a she, or what that all means, but he agrees she's done some major research. He's seen her work before. Her name could just be a way of mocking MysteryMom7, he speculates.

I start getting emails from people I've encountered in the comment sections of serial killer websites. I get one from Michael

By now, my living room walls are completely covered in printouts and notes I've assembled in an attempt to connect every clue gathered. It's gruesome wallpaper.

Winger, a Norwegian psychic. In 2011, he was the winner of Norway's *Psychic Challenge* TV show.

"I believe this is more than just one man," Winger says. "I believe it is a group of men that know each other. I don't think the killers have stopped. I believe one is a doctor. Another is a lawyer. I think they play with the victims before they kill them. They are friends with police. The police have no idea their friends are killers...."

* * *

I PROMISED myself I wouldn't become a case obsessive. Nor would I bug the authorities like some kind of crackpot. Yet here I am, after my time on the Paradise website, picking up the phone and dialing the FBI. An operator puts me through to the number of an agent handling the Long Island Serial Killer case. It goes to voicemail.

I leave an out-of-breath message on his phone. "I've found this website. I'd like to talk to you about it…."

An FBI operator calls me back. She sounds like she's used to hearing from people like me. I leave a voicemail for another agent, and imagine my message getting stored on a Zip drive next to voicemails from Zero and Money and LindseyLohan6 and MysteryMom7, and who knows how many others.

Not long after my attempted outreach to the FBI, I ask a former NYPD detective-squad commander if he thinks the internet has made life more dangerous. His first internet-related cases began in 1995. Over the years, he's followed digital footprints to solve missing person cases, suicides, and hacker intrusions.

"It's a different kind of dangerous," he replies. After pointing out that the internet has the power to save lives and disseminate information, he says it also allows people to become targets—of stalkers, identity thieves, and, yes, killers.

I ask his view of civilians on the internet trying to crack a case like that of the Long Island Serial Killer. He responds, "We don't always have the manpower. I only have so many detectives. Serial killer cases go to the top of the list. But that doesn't mean I have a taskforce of 60 detectives whose sole purpose in life is to eat, shit, breathe this case."

Why not tap the LISK online community for help then? I ask. Especially when it comes to identifying victims. It seems impossible for a person today to not leave behind a digital trace. And here, some of the unknown victims may even have advertised online.

"Here's the problem with prostitutes," the ex-detective tells me. "Most of them are runaways. You have these guys who pick you up on the street and take you home. There's nobody that's going to declare you missing."

But according to Robert Kolker's 2013 book, *Lost Girls,* most of the known LISK victims were not runaways. They spoke with their families often. Some of their families even knew they were escorts.

Escorts, until recently, could advertise on Backpage.com, paying with Bitcoin. (The U.S. government shut the site down in April 2018.) While researching this article, I answer an ad that says, "Elite Vixen seeks Arts Benefactor." In her video, she wears a white furry hat, and dances behind a glass door. I tell her my purpose and ask what name she uses. She writes back, "I am known as Agent Provocateur: Confidante of Politicians and Billionaires."

"I am a very security-conscious business woman," she replies when I ask if she's ever afraid of what's on the other side of the computer screen. "I only reply to emails where there is proper spelling, courtesy, and grammar." She tells me she prefers conservative white men over the age of 45. Then she adds, "Ted Bundy was that, too, though."

She's been an escort for 20 years and has seen the way the industry has shifted from the street to the internet. Basically, she says, Craigslist killed the pimp.

When I ask what she thinks can be done to prevent the sex-worker population from being preyed upon by serial killers, she says, "I feel bad for the [escorts] of the USA who are also persecuted by the police, hence are afraid to call the police. Only a very desperate woman would go meet strange men for sex or money without precaution. There is a lot of prostitution since the market crash.... We need full legalization and taxation of sex and marijuana just like my home country of Germany."

Agent Provocateur points out that government registration of escorts for tax purposes would mean if they went missing, they'd be easier to report.

Early in her career, she worked at an exclusive Atlanta brothel. Six girls in a town house. Some of her clients were Coca-Cola execs and Atlanta Braves ballplayers. One day, a coworker went missing. The prime suspect was the brothel owner. As far as Agent Provocateur knows, the young woman was never found.

In the case of Shannan Gilbert, she was eventually discovered, of course. Tragically, her mother Mari died before knowing the exact circumstances surrounding her daughter's death.

In July 2016, Mari Gilbert was murdered. Shortly after I took down my gruesome wallpaper, a friend who worked at a hospital emergency room told me he saw one of Mari's other daughters, Sarra, brought into the ER covered in blood and strapped into a straitjacket. Sarra had stabbed her mother 227 times and bludgeoned her corpse with a fire extinguisher. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, she is serving a sentence of 25 years to life.

Just five months earlier, in February 2016, a second autopsy of Shannan was performed by former medical examiner Michael Baden. Baden was New York City's chief medical examiner in the late seventies, and a prominent forensic expert on TV.

Baden's report found evidence suggesting Shannan had been strangled to death. He agreed to perform the autopsy only after Mari and her attorney made enough noise about the police mishandling the case. This mishandling was a belief rooted deep on the internet—the desktop detectives had been heard, and their posting led to some important action.

Law enforcement has now been working the Long Island Serial Killer case for nearly a decade, with no resolution in sight. After my months in the world of online gumshoes, I don't find it inconceivable that justice might be profitably outsourced—advanced, accelerated—by individuals like Zero and LindsayLohan6, and by Websleuths, people determined to bring a killer out of the shadows.

As for Agent Provocateur, she laments the way too many female victims of serial killers go unreported, but finds comfort in her belief in multiple lives. With great confidence, she tells me, "The killer will be reincarnated as the victims."

Shane Cashman has written for The Atlantic, The Los Angeles Review of Books, VICE, BBC Travel, Catapult, and other publications. He teaches at the Hudson Valley Writers Center and Manhattanville College.

PHOTO: MOTORTION FILMS / SHUTTERSTOCK

FRIENDLY COMPETITION

BY JENNY NORDBAK

WINNER gets to fuck the loser."

How the three of us had ended up here was something of a mystery. Ryan was my personal trainer at the gym and Claire was one of his other clients. Claire and I had started hanging out and holding each other accountable for working out, but every Friday we got to relax and do something fun.

After a few too many tequilas one Friday night, we began texting our seriously hot, much younger trainer. It had started with fairly innocent messages, but quickly escalated until he persuaded us to send him pictures of us making out.

We were mortified the next morning when we read back through it all, but somehow Ryan was so relaxed about the whole thing that it didn't make things weird between us. Now there was just an overwhelming amount of sexual tension that built with each training session.

Claire and I did it again the following Friday. This time, there was no innocent warm-up and we didn't need booze to give us courage. We started by sending a picture of Claire's tits and asking him to guess which of us they belonged to.

I KEPT SLAPPING HER JIGGLING ASS WITH ONE HAND AND SLID THE OTHER DOWN HER SLICK PUSSY AND RAMMED TWO FINGERS INSIDE HER.

"Easy. Claire," came his immediate reply.

We rewarded him by sending a picture of my slightly bigger tits.

"I bet I can guess your pussies, too," he texted back.

We looked at each other and shrugged, too horny not to go for it. By the time we both got our pants and underwear off, we were giggling and touching each other playfully.

In the picture we ended up sending him, we were each spreading the other's cunt open, fingers just barely starting to slide inside.

"I'm coming over. Send me the address," was his response.

"Tell us who's on the left and who's on the right and we'll send it to you."

"Claire's on the left."

We sent him the address with a follow-up text that said, "Better hurry."

It took him 20 minutes to get there, but he brought us a strap-on with a big pink dick attached and an idea for a game he wanted us to play.

"I'm going to move all the furniture out of the way and you two are going to wrestle. You have to pin your opponent's shoulders flat on the ground for three seconds to win or get them to tap out. Tapping out is like your safe word if you ever want to stop, too. Winner gets to fuck the loser with this," he said, holding up the strap-on.

"And you're just going to watch?" I asked him coyly.

"No. I'm going to fuck the winner while she fucks the loser."

Wrestling, as it turned out, was harder than I thought. We began playfully, rolling around the floor mimicking the wrestling moves we'd seen, but mostly just grinding our naked bodies together. It was surprisingly difficult to pin Claire down.

Ryan talked a bunch of shit from the sidelines, shouting commands at us like he usually did at the gym, but now they were naughty commands.

"Pinch her nipple. Slap her ass. Pull her hair. No rules in this wrestling match."

At first, we were both too timid to be rough with each other, but eventually, the claws came out. We both wanted to get fucked by Ryan, and I for one was willing to fight dirty for the privilege.

Claire was so intent on not letting me pin her back and shoulders to the mat that I was able to flip her over and pin her on her stomach with me sitting on her hips to hold her down. I spanked her hard a few times, making her squeal and buck against me, but I outweighed her by quite a bit, so I managed to hold her in place.

I kept slapping her jiggling ass with one hand and slid the other down her slick pussy and rammed two fingers inside her. Instead of fighting me, Claire moaned and parted her legs more, sliding a hand under herself to rub her clit.

She groaned, "I'm not going to argue if you're going to give me some foreplay before I beat you and get Ryan's cock."

"Oh yeah?" I asked, pulling my fingers from her pussy and pushing them into her ass. She yelped and tried to pull away, but now that one of her arms was trapped under her, I had even more leverage to keep her down. I expected her to tap out, but she went back to rubbing her clit.

"Ryan didn't say where I get to fuck you," I told her. "Tap out now, and I'll fuck your cunt. Keep fighting me, and I'm sticking that dildo in this tight little ass with no lube."

"So vicious!" she gasped, but she double tapped the ground, so I let her up. "I'm too horny to care at this point," she said, getting on all fours and spreading herself open for me. "Someone

PHOTO: RAZOOMANET / SHUTTERSTOCK

please just fuck me."

Claire rubbed her clit as I got the harness on, then I was nudging the big pink dildo inside her, working it in with gentle thrusts until I was able to slide it all the way in and out.

"Oh, fuck yes," she moaned. "Fuck me harder!"

Ryan had said he would fuck me while I fucked her, but now he seemed intent on watching, coming closer and spreading her cheeks wider so he could see everything as I hammered into her. She quickly came, moaning deeply and shuddering against me before flopping onto the floor in a panting heap.

"Stay there," Ryan said, sliding on a condom. "Loser also gets to swallow."

Claire grinned liked he'd just offered her ice cream and started touching herself again, lying under us as Ryan pushed me forward onto my hands and knees and started to spread my cunt open with his thick cock. Without being asked, Claire pressed her thumb to my clit and rubbed it in quick little circles as Ryan thrust into me, fucking me so hard and deep.

It usually takes me a while to come, but the intensity of it all pushed me over the edge in a matter of minutes. Ryan managed to hold on that long, then he pulled out, took the condom off, and thrust into Claire's mouth before he came, too.

"Same time next Friday?" he asked when we'd all relaxed for a while and he was leaving.

"Hell yes," Claire and I said at the same time.

Jenny Nordbak is a retired dominatrix and author of "The Scarlett Letters: My Secret Year of Men in an L.A. Dungeon."

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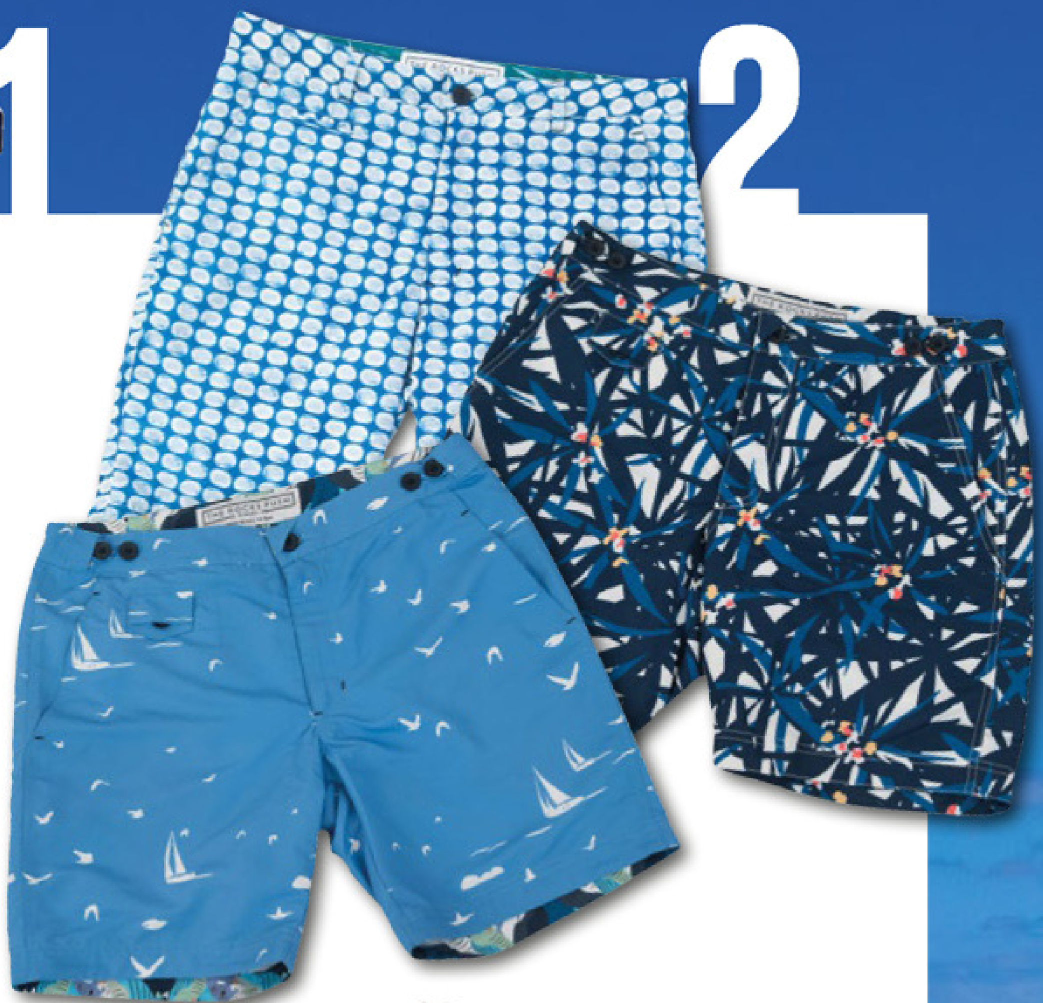

SUMMER ATTIRE

BEACH BOUND

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pacificooptical.com

2. ROCKS PUSH SWIM TRUNKS

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therockspush.com

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sperry.com

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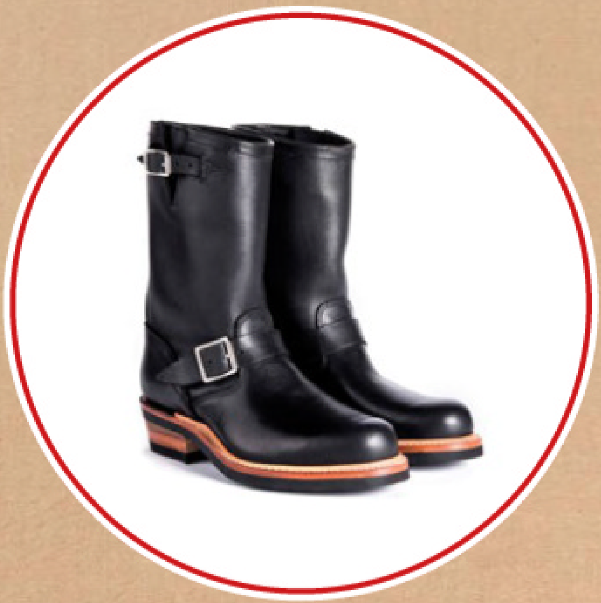

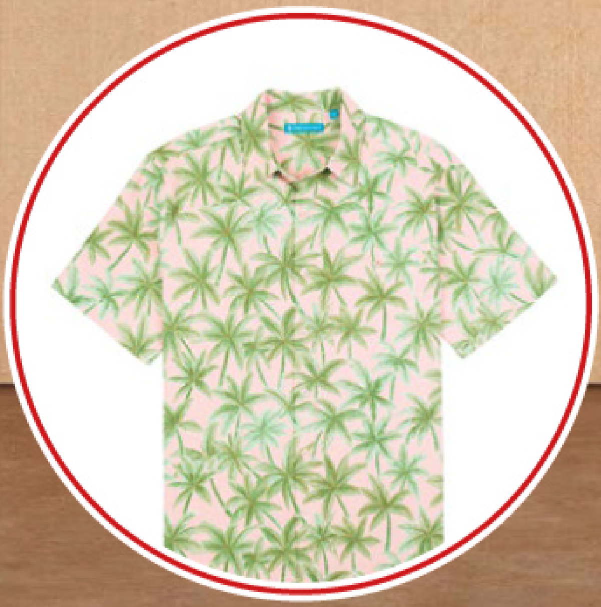

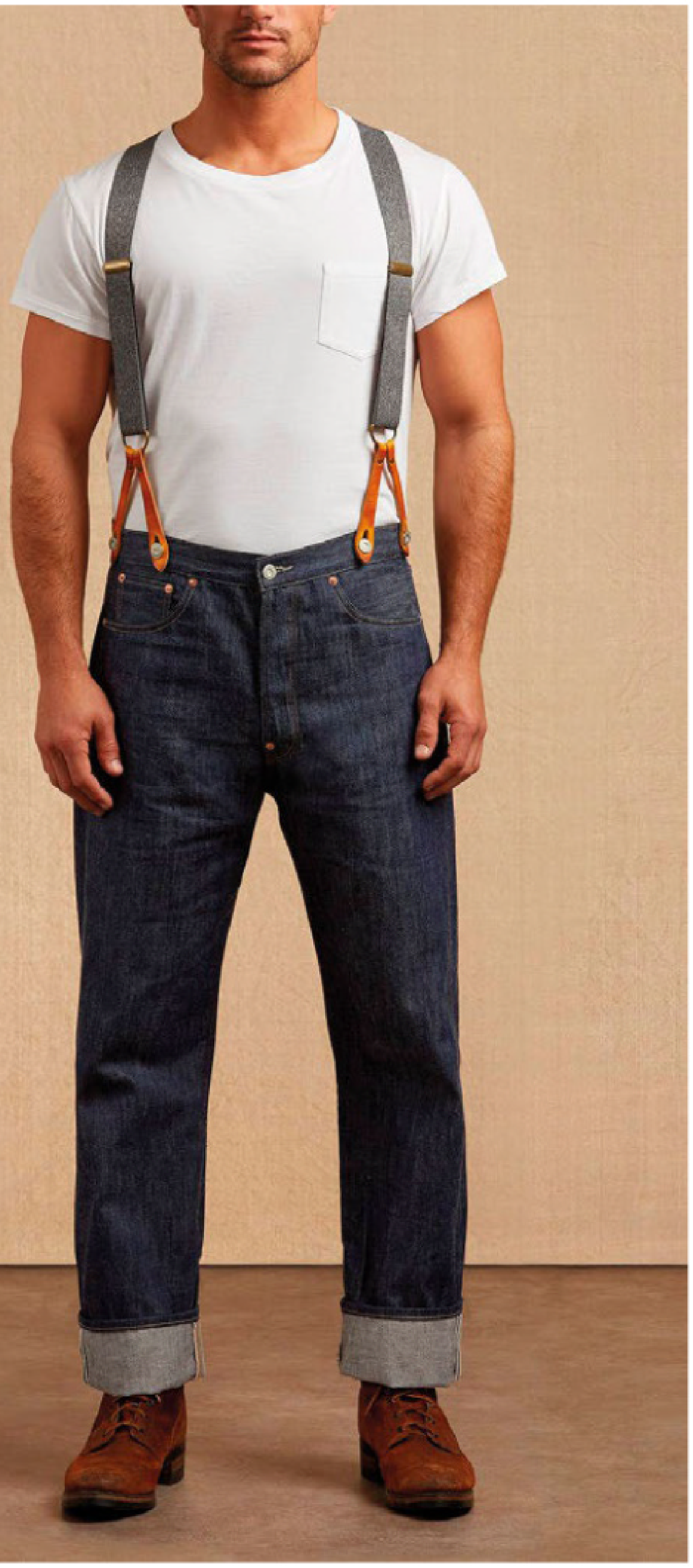

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levi.com

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Hollywood is all about commanding attention, so get ahead of the game by wearing something loud and fresh. You'll leave that party with a sexy actress on your arm—guaranteed.

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tomford.com

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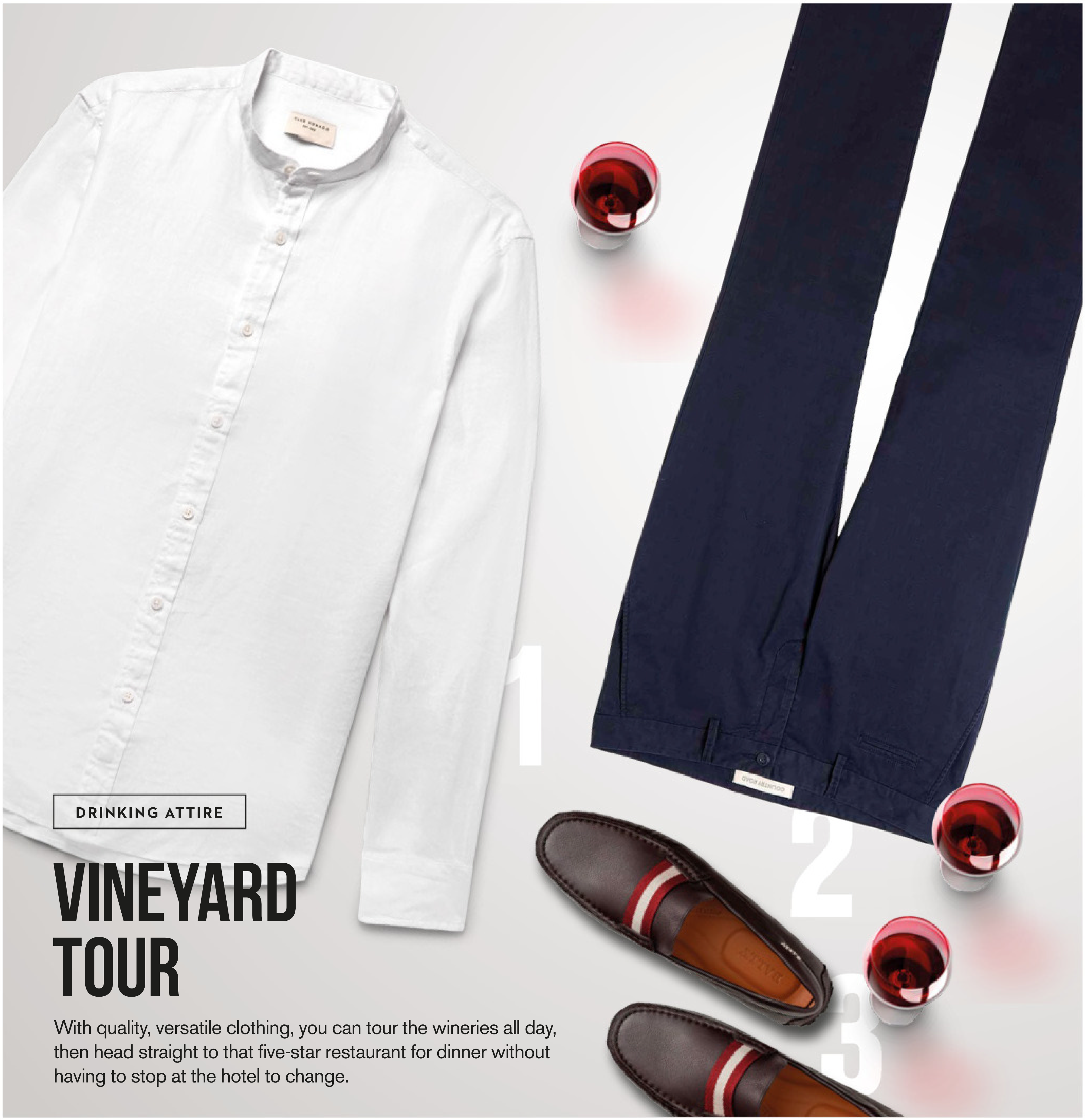
Dinner parties necessitate a dinner jacket, and something with flair and panache like this velvet beauty will get the attention of all the starlets in Tinseltown.

favourbrook.com



DRINKING ATTIRE

VINEYARD TOUR

With quality, versatile clothing, you can tour the wineries all day, then head straight to that five-star restaurant for dinner without having to stop at the hotel to change.

1. CLUB MONACO LINEN SHIRT

Wine regions are known for their hot days and chilly evenings, so natural fibers are a must. Wear this linen shirt all afternoon, then throw a cashmere sweater over it when the sun goes down.

clubmonaco.com

2. COUNTRY ROAD SLIM STRETCH CHINOS

With just a tiny bit of stretch, these cotton trousers are not only comfy, they look excellent. Pair with a cotton tee or your favorite button-down and you're ready for anything.

countryroad.com

3. BALLY PILOT PEBBLED DRIVING SHOE

You probably shouldn't be behind the wheel if you're on a three-day wine bender, but even if you're not driving you can still sport these supremely comfortable Italian-leather driving shoes.

bally.com

WINTER ATTIRE

WINTER IN NEW YORK

Manhattan is a fashionable town, and it's also a walking town, so looking good and being comfortable are equally important. These items should fit the bill for your Big Apple jaunt.

DENTS CARLISLE LEATHER GLOVES

Dents has been making gloves since 1777, so they know what they're doing. These gloves are made from hairsheep and lined with rabbit fur, making them snug, soft, and warm.

dentsgloves.com

HUGO BOSS T-SCOTTAS CASHMERE SCARF

A toasty scarf makes all the difference when you're hoofing 20 cold blocks to meet friends for dinner. Even better when it's made from the softest Italian cashmere.

hugoboss.com

JOSEPH GLASTONBURY OVERCOAT

Long coats are the shit in frigid weather, and this one is tailored to make you look like the success you may or may not be. Be smart and bundle up in style.

modesens.com

1

2

OR
OUTDOOR RESEARCH

HIKING ATTIRE

ALPINE WEEKEND

Being able to pack economically for a weekend of mountain sports with your buddies makes traveling so much easier. Here's gear to make that possible.

3

4

ROLEX
EXPLORER II
24
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
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22

1. MONCLER AUBIN QUILTED JACKET

Puffer jackets are a necessity when hiking up a mountain. Problem is, most are as stylish as dung. This one's made to look like a biker jacket, so you can enjoy the toasty lightweight comfort of goose down without feeling like a tool.

store.moncler.com

2. OUTDOOR RESEARCH ALTI GLOVES

These are the gloves to have when the temperature plummets but you're still hell-bent on getting out on the mountain. They're durable, dexterous, waterproof, and warm AF, thanks to the Gore-Tex inserts and PrimaLoft insulation.

outdoorresearch.com

3. DANNER KEVLAR LIGHT II BOOTS

You don't want to dick around with equipment issues when you're in the middle of a weekend-long trek, so invest in the best. Danner hiking boots not only look good, they're waterproof and lightweight, with superior traction and stability.

danner.com

4. ROLEX EXPLORER II

This ridiculously elegant and durable watch was made for extreme conditions. Its distinctive white dial is designed for easy readability, with tarnish-free 18-carat gold hour markers, and the Oysterlock clasp will never open accidentally. It will last you a lifetime, and then some.

rolex.com

SKINCARE

TRAVEL-SIZE ESSENTIALS

2

3

Staying clean and cool while traveling isn't difficult with all the brands out there literally competing for your face. Here are some of our favorite products to keep you looking and smelling good, no matter where the road takes you.

1. GENTSAC TRAVEL ESSENTIALS KIT

Designed for the discerning traveler, everything in the gentSac Travel Kit is under 3.4 ounces, so there won't be any problems getting through airport security. The kit includes body wash, face wash, shave foam, toothpaste, lip balm, and roll-on deodorant.

gentsac.com

2. TRUEFITT & HILL TURNBACK SHAVING BRUSH

Truefitt's shaving brushes are handmade in the U.K. with the finest super badger hair, which holds significantly more water than synthetic bristles. This one comes with a protective acrylic travel tube that doubles as an extended handle.

truefittandhill.com

3. MANKIND BOTANICAL SOOTHING HYDRAMIST

This travel-size spray-on toner uses white tea, gingko, and vitamins E and B5 to calm and soothe the skin after shaving or being exposed to the elements. It's perfect to use after a flight or in overly air-conditioned hotels.

gentsac.com

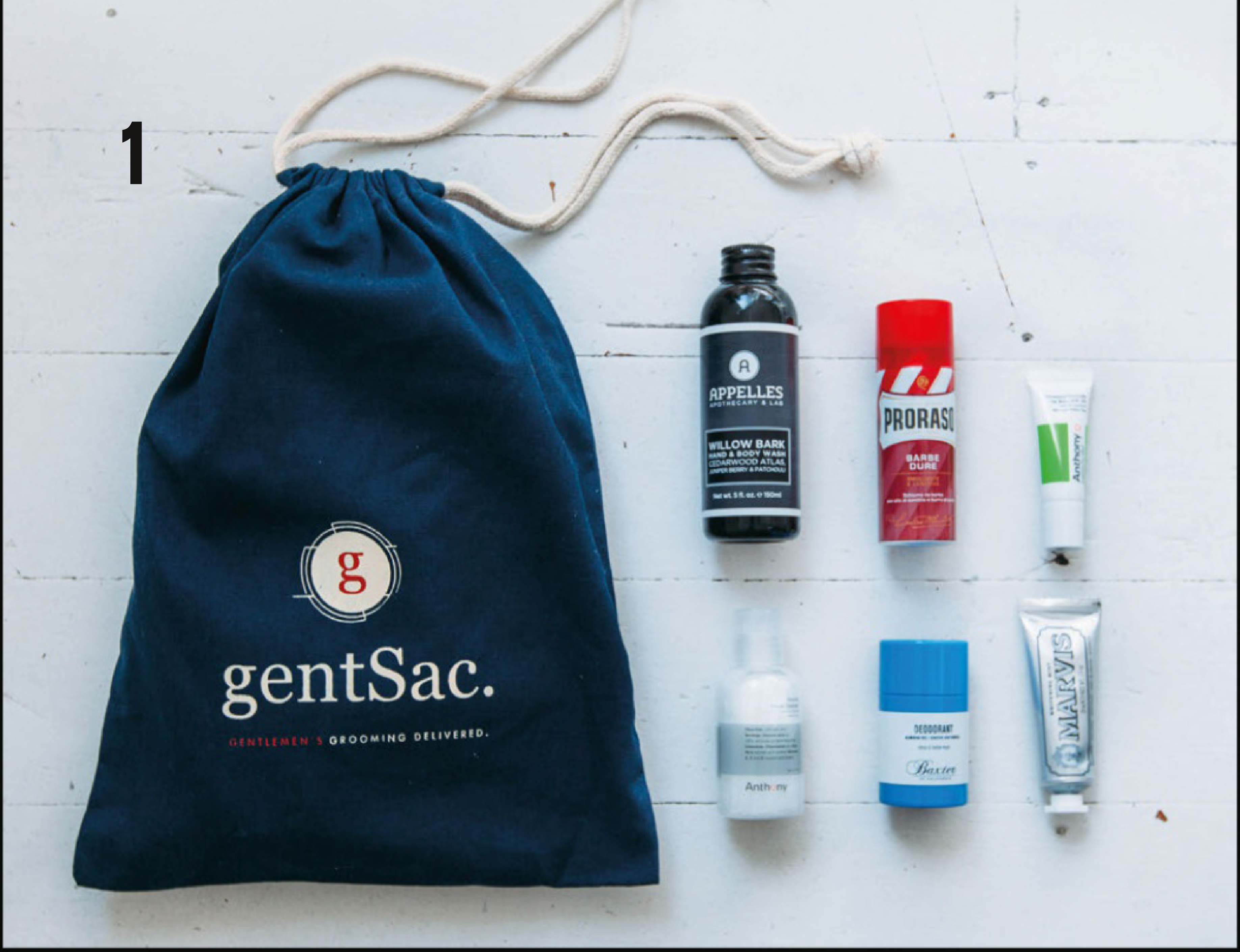
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PHOTO: LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS / SHUTTERSTOCK

Sparring Opponents

AFTER sparring with my office rival, Jeff, during a meeting, I was delighted to find myself in the elevator car alone. A quiet, solitary ride between floors was exactly what I needed to get my head on straight again.

Just as my eyes drifted closed, a sharp *ding* echoed through the small space, signaling that someone else was about to enter. At first, all I could see was a large, masculine hand with long, thick fingers. Then the doors to the elevator opened fully, revealing my companion for the ride.

Jeff smirked at me as he stepped into the elevator. “Always a pleasure, Kat,” he said, his gaze fixed firmly on my cleavage.

The doors closed with another *ding,* punctuating Jeff’s sentence.

The truth is that Jeff got under my skin in more ways than one. Whenever he looked at me with a glint of a challenge in his steely gray eyes, an insistent pulse picked up between my legs.

Today was no different. The gap between my thighs had already grown wet, making my stockings so damp that the fabric clung to my skin. A backlog of laundry meant that I was going commando, so there was no barrier to prevent the thin material from molding itself to my pussy, perfectly forming to fit the shape of my mound.

Now I couldn’t help but wonder how it would feel if Jeff’s big hands were to caress my skin. When we shook on a recent deal, I noticed that the pads of his fingers are lightly callused. A shiver traveled up my spine as I imagined that thick, roughened skin brushing over the soft insides of my thighs.

Right as things really started to heat up in my mind, the lights in the elevator dimmed and the car jolted to a violent stop, sending us both to the floor.

I landed sprawled on top of Jeff. Somehow my thigh had gotten wedged between his legs. In my haste to stand quickly and minimize the awkwardness of the encounter, I rubbed right against Jeff’s raging erection. It poked my hip, like a nice little nudge from the universe urging me to drop the pretense of professionalism and ride that fucking cock.

The elevator’s emergency lights flickered to life, bathing the car in a warm, yellow glow. Our eyes met and, I swear, this electric charge of attraction arced between us. All that sniping and bickering was little more than foreplay. It was time that we finally experienced the main event.

I’m not sure who made the first move, but we came together somewhere in the center of the elevator. Within seconds we dissolved into a tangle of limbs. Our hands were everywhere, mapping the planes of one another’s bodies while we tugged at the cumbersome office attire that stood in our way.

My pencil skirt was already rolled up over my hips when a static hiss sounded from the corner. A disembodied voice informed us that it would take a couple of hours for help to arrive.

Jeff looked at the elevator’s speaker panel, then back at me. “How many times can I make you come in two hours, Kat?” he asked.

I wasn’t sure, but I was pretty fucking excited to find out.

Jeff slid down my body and settled in between my legs. His broad shoulders bumped against my thighs, urging my legs to open even wider.

He skimmed his thumb over the seam in my stockings that ran directly over the center of my pussy. Pinching the sheer material between his thumb and forefinger, he pulled it away from my body and asked, “You’re not attached to these, are you?”

The second I shook my head, Jeff tore the stockings at their stitches. Using his thumbs, he pushed the material to one side, clearing the way for his tongue to land on my mound. He charted a path between my pussy lips, starting from the outer edges and gradually circling toward the center.

Every sweep of Jeff’s tongue brought him closer to my clit, leaving me breathless with anticipation. Then, finally, he pressed it against my nub and licked me from top to bottom.

I groaned as the tip of Jeff’s tongue tapped against my hole. He circled the sensitive edges, teasing me with the suggestion of penetration. I was so ready to feel him inside me—even if it was only his tongue.

Jeff, however, appeared to have different plans. He moved away from my vagina and licked his way back to my clit. When he reached his target, he sucked it between his lips and gave it a quick flick with the tip of his tongue.

My toes curled and my fingers flexed. Gasping for breath, I gathered just enough air to scream, “Oh, God!”

All the blood in my body seemed to rush straight to my pelvis, flooding the area with heat that felt like little flames licking at my skin. That’s when I really started to lose control.

I writhed on the elevator floor,

> ***Every sweep of Jeff's tongue brought him closer to my clit, leaving me breathless with anticipation.***

completely overcome with pleasure. My back arched, pulling me up to a sitting position as the first orgasm washed over me.

Jeff looked up and pinned me with a self-satisfied smirk. "One," he murmured as he continued to nuzzle my pussy.

My muscles still twitched from the force of my orgasm, but that wasn't stopping Jeff. He curled his strong fingers around my hips, flipped me onto my belly, and pulled me up onto all fours in one fluid motion.

Now both of my holes were exposed and perfectly displayed for Jeff's viewing enjoyment. One callused fingertip traced my pussy hole.

After dipping a digit inside me, Jeff returned his attention to my folds. He trailed his slickened finger from one side to the other, tracing my dips and curves.

From there, he plotted a path to my asshole. His finger swirled around it, spreading my juices so that he could easily slide over the delicate skin, then he eased his finger inside.

Jeff pushed gently against the thin wall between my asshole and my pussy. Adding that tiny bit of pressure made the pleasant sensations spread from my ass to my pussy.

I tilted my head back, groaning. There was only one finger up my ass, but it made me feel incredibly full.

Once my body had relaxed, Jeff pulled out his dick and dragged the tip of it against my slit. I was so fucking wet that he was able to ease inside me with a single push of his hips. He began to move them rhythmically, driving his dick in at an angle that had him hitting my G spot with every thrust.

Having never truly come down from my first orgasm, I could already feel the second one roaring toward me. Spasms started to rock my pussy as my walls grew tighter, gripping Jeff's dick.

I was already so close when Jeff moved his free hand around to my front and nestled it between my thighs. One, two, three rotations of his fingers over my clit and I came again, stronger and much wetter than before. Warm liquid spurted from my pussy. Rivulets ran down my thighs, thoroughly soaking us both.

"Two," Jeff said huskily.

He continued to fuck me hard and fast, riding the waves of pleasure right along with me. "You've got more in you, I know it," he said. My quivering pussy seemed to concur.

I rolled from one crest to the next, sucking in short breaths of air to sustain myself. We were both moving our hips now, pounding away at one another as though we could work out all the years of tension between us with one afternoon of hot, animalistic sex.

"Come on, Kat, give it to me," Jeff growled. The flat of his palm landed on my ass cheek, delivering a brief bite of pain followed by a warm, tingling sensation that spread to my cunt.

The walls of my pelvis grew impossibly tight, ready to milk Jeff for every last drop of pleasure that he had to offer. The pulse in my pussy intensified as my muscles contracted, gripping his dick.

Before the groan escaped Jeff's lips, I could hear it rumbling in his chest. "Three!"

Jeff's shout was long and loud. He drew out the word, holding onto it for as long as he could. The sound echoed off the elevator walls, drowning out the harsh hiss of my own shallow breaths.

The fluorescent elevator lights flickered back to life the moment Jeff eased his dick from inside me. That was the only warning we received before the car resumed its journey to our floor. We righted our clothes as quickly as we could, making ourselves appear semi-presentable with seconds to spare before the doors opened.

We shared a knowing smile, then went our separate ways. There was no doubt we would go head-to-head in the boardroom again, but at least all future occurrences would now be capped off with hot, dirty sex.

—Kat T., Chicago, Illinois

PHOTO: PHOTOGRAPHEE.EU ; LA BELLA STUDIO / SHUTTERSTOCK

Car Banging

T was silly the way my wife, Tammy, dipped her head when she laughed. We were out to dinner and she cracked up at something stupid I said. I say a lot of stupid stuff, so I don't remember what it was. →

PHOTO: VOLODYMYR TVERDOKHLIB / SHUTTERSTOCK

When her long, dark hair fell in front of her face like a soft curtain, it made me think of her sucking my cock—the way her hair settled around her cheeks and often brushed my thighs as she moved over me.

The craving for my wife's mouth was sudden and intense. When the waiter brought our check, I practically threw my credit card at him.

Tammy looked surprised, but she also had a look of curiosity. She knew something was up—something sexual. I could tell by the way her Kewpie-doll lips curled into a half-smile. I took her hand and squeezed.

"Why are you in such a hurry all of a sudden?" she asked, curling her index finger against my palm. It was an utterly innocent and insanely seductive motion.

My brain stopped, my cock stirred, and I struggled to find words. I shrugged, then laughed. "Dirty thoughts."

She raised a single lovely eyebrow, licked her lips, and squeezed my hand. "Do tell."

"That thing you did."

She kept curling her finger against my palm, and my cock got rock-hard.

"What thing?" She looked genuinely confused.

"When you looked down and your hair fell—"

"That's it?" She laughed.

The waiter interrupted. I quickly signed the slip and took my card back.

Tammy just stared at me, waiting.

I leaned forward and stage-whispered, "My dick, your mouth."

"Let's go," she said, standing. She smoothed her black dress along her luscious curves.

Just looking at my wife and her banging body made me want to push my cock into her mouth, hold her hair, and go to town.

She smiled at me, knowing my dirty thoughts, and held her hand out. I took it and we left the restaurant.

When we got in my car, she turned to face me. "Get your cock out."

I glanced around the small parking lot. "Here?"

"Do what I ask. I don't want to wait."

There was a touch of steel in her voice, and it made my spine shiver. I unzipped my pants and pulled my dick out.

Tammy bent over the space between the seats and put her mouth on my cockhead. She drew on it slowly, pausing to slide her tongue along the tip. Her small hand slid up and down my shaft, giving me the friction I craved.

My breath came in short bursts. I scanned the well-lit parking lot, realizing we'd be visible to anyone who walked by. The threat of it had me on edge.

She squeezed my shaft and sucked, pushing her velvety soft mouth down my length and pressing her lips to the base.

I put my hand on the back of her head and pushed my fingers into her thick hair. I thrusted up just a little, trying to control myself. I wanted to come so badly, but fuck me–I did not want it to end. Not yet.

The restaurant door opened and a couple stepped out. We both froze, my wife's head bent, her fist wrapped around my cock. Arm in arm, the couple laughed and headed away from our car.

Tammy chuckled sexily. "Now, where was I?"

She put her mouth back on my cock and pushed her lips down my length, using her tongue to lap at me. She did this for a few more minutes until, somewhat abruptly, she sat back and put her seatbelt on. "I think you should take us home, right now."

I didn't even put my cock away. I started the car, turned on the lights, and tried not to speed on the ten-minute drive to our house.

I pulled into the driveway and parked. Tammy immediately got out, but instead of heading to the front door of our house, she stopped in front of the car, hiked up her dress, pulled off her panties, and flashed her bare pussy at me.

Needing no further invitation, I quickly got out of the car and joined her.

Tammy rested her bare ass on the hood of the car as I slid my hands across the tops of her thighs. When I pushed my fingers inside her cunt, I found her soaked. I painted slow, wet circles over her clit, making her hiss like I'd burned her.

Although we have neighbors, the house next to ours was dark, thank God. I barely gave them a second thought as I grabbed my wife's hips and turned her over.

Tammy planted her hands on the car hood and thrust her perfect ripe ass back at me. I knocked her stance wider with my knees, then grabbed her hips and plunged my cock in. I knew she was ready. I knew she could take it.

Tammy groaned and pushed back against me. Her tight, wet pussy engulfed me, and it was my turn to groan. I dug my fingers into her flesh and pulled her against me as I pushed into her.

She was panting, saying words I couldn't hear because she was facing away from me. She went up on her tiptoes and angled herself just so. That's when she came, her pussy massaging my cock with the most amazing spasms. I gritted my teeth against the nearly overwhelming urge to come.

Within no time, Tammy started pushing against me again as her hand slid down to work her pussy. I felt it tickle my balls as she stroked her clit. I felt her tightening again as I kept slamming into her.

She came a second time, gasping and then laughing. Then she bumped her hips back, sending me off-balance.

Her dress fell around her ass as she stood up, turned around, then pushed me back, my bare ass landing on the warm hood. She squatted down in front of me, somehow looking elegant in her black dress and high heels despite us being in a semi-darkened driveway.

She began to lick my cock slowly, her bright blue gaze pinned to me. "Your cock is so wet. You taste like me," she murmured. I growled and pushed my hand into her hair,

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> ***The sensation of her finger inside my asshole and her mouth on my dick made my head swim.***

holding her steady as she lapped at me.

Finally, I got impatient. “Suck it,” I said. “Put it in your mouth.”

She laughed softly as her mouth engulfed my cock. Her hand came up to cradle my balls and she gave them a gentle squeeze. I shut my eyes.

Her movements became faster. She sucked and licked and squeezed until I was moving restlessly.

“How’s that, baby?” she asked during a momentary break.

I could only nod, bumping my hips forward to meet her mouth.

She went back to work, swallowing me down. Her soft, cool hand moved between my thighs, stroking along the top, over the base of my cock, down the other thigh. All the while, she used her mouth to torture me.

Her fingers stroked, soft as silk along my skin. She reached her hand through my legs to caress my ass cheeks. She kept me off-balance by constantly moving her fingers over my body. I was gasping for air, so close to coming it felt like there was a lead weight in my pelvis.

Tammy pushed her fingertip against my asshole and I gasped. I hadn’t been expecting it. She giggled, licking my balls.

“Relax,” she told me.

I took a deep breath and did as she said. She dragged her fingers through her own wetness, and it helped her slide her finger in.

She went slowly at first, pushing past the tight ring of muscle. I focused on the glide of her warm mouth along my cock, the way she ran her tongue over my tip.

She pushed a bit farther, breaching me. The sensation of her finger inside my asshole and her mouth on my dick made my head swim. Thunder rumbled somewhere in the dark summer sky, and I felt the vibration in my bones like a drumbeat.

Tammy pushed her finger in fully and curled it, working it like a pro. Her mouth never ceased, her tongue constantly teased, and every once in a while she drew on me deeply. I felt that pleasure in my core.

She moved her mouth and worked her finger faster, and that was that. I pushed my hands into her hair, holding her that way until my orgasm’s last spasm passed, and until the very last drop of my come had been wrung from me, down Tammy’s throat.

She looked up at me and asked, “Did any of that match your dirty thoughts, my darling?”

Just then I felt the raindrops start, and I took my wife inside to do it all over again.

—L.J., via email

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Cock-Tailing

AFTER working a double shift at the neighborhood pub, only the bartender and I remained. Ben and I had been dancing around one another for a while, always flirting but never taking it further. That was about to change.

PHOTO: PAVEL L PHOTO AND VIDEO / SHUTTERSTOCK

When Ben offered to mix me a drink to sustain me during cleanup, I gratefully accepted. His hand brushed against my side as he reached for a bottle of sour-apple martini mixer, sending a shower of sparks over my skin.

Looking at Ben, I could tell he felt it, too. He turned and walked toward me, backing me up until I bumped against the bar.

With his lips close to mine, Ben reached behind me and placed the bottle on the bar. He was so close that his pelvis brushed against my belly, alerting me to a thick bulge tenting the front of his pants. Then he placed his other hand on the bar behind me, caging me in.

"Can I kiss you?" he asked.

That simple, innocent question melted me into a puddle right there. Unable to untie my tongue enough to respond, I nodded yes.

Ben's lips came swooping down onto mine. For a second, I stood frozen, my hands awkwardly dangling at my sides. Then Ben's tongue teased at my lips, silently asking permission to enter, and I jolted back to life.

I'd always secretly admired Ben's cute, perfectly round backside, so I decided to lay my hands there first. I fanned my fingers over his cheeks, covering the maximum amount of surface area before giving them a good, hard squeeze.

Ben liked that. He rocked his hips against me, making that lovely erection bump my belly again.

As much as I adored Ben's ass, my hands were itching to explore elsewhere. I swept over his hips and up his back's hard, chiseled contours. My hands bumped along the sculpted muscle, skimming up to his shoulder blades before heading back down to his delightfully firm ass.

Using my grip on Ben's butt, I pulled his hips hard against mine. There was that bulge again, so hot and solid. I rubbed myself against him, using my whole body to stroke Ben's cock through his pants.

I skirted my hands around his hips to unfasten his pants. Breaking off our kiss, Ben whispered against my lips, "Let me get back to making you that drink."

At that point, I didn't give two flying fucks about the drink. I wanted to put something else in my mouth.

But Ben was already moving away from me to grab a bottle of vodka off the shelf. He picked up a plastic cup, too, giving it a shake as he said, "No more cleanup for us."

Ben placed the cup and bottle down on the bar and set to work. I must admit, he's a gifted mixologist–even if he's just making a basic drink.

After Ben got all of the ingredients in the cup, he looked at me, eyebrows raised. "Can't get a cocktail shaker dirty now. Do you mind if I stir it?"

"Not at all." Anything to move on from mixology and get back to hooking up.

Rather than grab a stir straw from our prep station, Ben's fingers closed around the zipper I was so close to grasping before and gave it a tug. Even before he pulled his pants down his hips, I could see that his erection was fighting to be freed.

Finally, Ben pushed down his pants and his boxers all in one shot. His erection bobbed between us, hard and thick.

I itched to take hold of Ben's dick, but before I could reach out to touch him, he stepped around me and grabbed the glass full of his latest concoction.

My eyes widened as he dipped his erection into the cup and swiveled his hips, effectively mixing all the ingredients. When he pulled his shaft out, tiny droplets of sour-apple martini dripped off the tip.

"Take a taste," he whispered. "You know you want to."

At first I burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of it all, but once I got a look at Ben's hard, glistening cock, I leaned forward and caught a drop of the drink off the end of it. Its sweet-and-sour flavor bloomed in my mouth, making it water.

A tiny taste wasn't enough, though.

"Like it?" Ben asked.

Nodding, I curled my fingers around the base of his cock, snugly tucking him into my fist. Using my hand to direct him, I moved the cockhead to my parted lips. The tip of my tongue brushed against his hot, silken skin, but I wouldn't slide him inside my mouth just yet.

I paused, angling my eyes upward to look at Ben as he combed his fingers through my hair, holding my head steady as he breached my lips with his cock. My tongue slipped along his warm skin. Every inch of him tasted like a sour-apple sucking candy, and I was in the mood to suck.

Since Ben tasted like a lollipop, I decided to lick him like one. I slid him nice and deep into my mouth, relaxing my tongue and throat so that he moved in easily. Then I held him there for a bit, wiggling my tongue along his shaft's sensitive underside. I could feel the ridge of the thick vein that travels from base to tip. Such a nice, sensitive place to lick.

When Ben's hips hitched and the tip of his cock hit the back of my throat, I eased his length from my mouth, stopping when just the head remained trapped between my lips. Then I sucked that, too, so hard that my cheeks grew hollow, and still, I could taste the apple martini on his skin.

I released Ben's cock from my mouth with a pop, then I lavished my tongue over its bell-shaped head. A clear bead of pre-come had collected at his crown, so I licked that, too. The slick, salty liquid mixed with his candied-apple coating, creating a flavor I could never in a million years describe.

Normally I would use my hand to stimulate the spots my mouth couldn't reach, but I didn't want to waste any of that delicious cocktail. Instead, I swirled my tongue around Ben's crown, then I slowly

PHOTO: SAKKMESTERKE / SHUTTERSTOCK

Since Ben tasted like a lollipop, I decided to lick him like one. I slid him deep into my mouth, relaxing my throat so that he moved in easily.

spiraled downward, circling around until I reached the base.

I traced my tongue around the base of Ben's shaft, sweeping up all the sugary liquid. When I noticed that some had dropped as far as his balls, I licked those, too. His skin was warm against my mouth. Every crevice seemed to contain a bit of sour-apple flavor.

Thorough as my tongue bath was, I still couldn't be certain I'd cleaned off all the cocktail, so I took Ben's length deep into my mouth again. His cock's wide head tapped at the back of my throat, making my eyes water.

Eager to take him even deeper, I braced myself by curling my fingers into Ben's sturdy, sculpted thighs. Using my hold on him for leverage, I swayed forward and backward, allowing my mouth to glide along his cock while I moved.

Once I'd established a nice rhythm and felt steadier on my feet, I slid one hand from Ben's thigh to his balls. I caressed the thin, furrowed skin, enjoying the moaning sound he made after every sweep of my fingers. I cradled their weight in my palm, applying the tiniest bit of pressure as I stroked my thumb over his sac.

"Oh, God," he groaned.

A warm sense of pride washed over me as I continued to feverishly drive Ben's cock into my mouth. I loved hearing the sound of this man's pleasure, especially when I was the one inspiring it. I wanted to hear it again, to make Ben shout so loud that people out on the street could hear him.

The only logical solution was to add another hand to the mix. I curled my fingers around the base of Ben's cock, making them work in tandem with my mouth. The combination of my saliva and Ben's pre-come made his skin extra slick, and occasionally my fist would bump against my lips.

It was no bother to me. All I cared about in that moment was bringing Ben to his peak. He was so close, too. I could feel his balls growing tighter by the second. They were gearing up for an explosive finish.

When my lips reached the crown of his cock again, I decided to switch things up. Using my fist to keep working Ben's shaft, I allowed my mouth to focus all its energy on stimulating the oh-so-sensitive tip.

I swirled my tongue over the head of his cock, swiping up all the salty pre-come that collected there.

Ben's fingers flexed against my scalp. He'd already tangled his hands in my hair earlier; now he was using his hold on me to direct the way my mouth moved over his cock.

With another sharp inhale and a grunt, Ben came hard in my mouth, his come spurting against the back of my throat in hot jets.

My mouth was far past full by the time Ben's orgasm ended. I swallowed what I could, then licked off a drop that had dripped onto my lip.

Switching back into gentleman mode, Ben extended his hand to help me up off the floor, and I accepted it gladly. When he asked if I needed a ride home, I accepted that offer, too. I even let him come inside—both the apartment and my pussy.

—Katie K., Dallas, Texas

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BLONDE bombshell Ella Silver is our 2019 Penthouse Pet of the Year Runner-Up. The British stunner aspires to take to the skies as an airline pilot, but, truth be told, we like having her here on earth, where we can fully worship her statuesque beauty.

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THE GRITTY TRUTHS BEHIND MILITARY RECRUITMENT TODAY

Almost two decades into the forever war, recruiting new servicemembers for the American military has become more complicated.

BY MATT GALLAGHER

WHEN I came to this assignment, everyone said, *Oh, you got it easy—the South? Military community? You got nuthin' to worry about*…but it's been hard. A legit hustle. These kids grew up during the wars, seen their parents come and go. They know what military life is really like…can't sell them on the perks, on the adventure. Yeah, the economy is good. That makes [recruiting] harder. Yeah, there's a lot of kids out there who can't qualify, because of the various requirements. Can't speak to national trends. But here? Here it's the wars, man. It's killing me."

Those are the words of a staff sergeant working as a recruiter in the United States Army in the summer of 2019. (He wishes to remain anonymous for, well, obvious reasons.) Recruiting fresh bodies and young minds to the armed forces is a tried and true tradition—the Roman Empire offered farms and a share of war spoils for aspiring legionnaires, while Napoleon's recruiters used to frequent taverns late at night for recruits. Since the American green machine ended the draft and switched to an all-volunteer force in 1973, the onus of collecting new manpower lays entirely with recruiters.

It's a dirty, often thankless job, but someone's gotta do it. And it's getting harder.

The Army fell short of its recruiting numbers goal in 2018 by a few thousand—the first time this has happened since the peak of the Iraq War in the aughts. (The Army's just one branch, sure, but it's by far the largest service, with 37 percent of servicemembers.) What the good staff sergeant above called "various requirements"? It's a legitimate concern.

According to an August 2018 report in *The American Conservative,* "One in three potential recruits are disqualified from service because they're overweight, one in four cannot meet minimal educational standards…and one in ten have a criminal history. In plain terms, about 71 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds (the military's target pool of potential recruits) are disqualified from the minute they enter a recruiting station."

It's not just a skeptical mom these recruiters have to convince, these days.

"Yeah, we can get waivers for some physical/mental/moral character concerns," an Army major who once worked as a medical recruiter at Fort Hamilton, New York, told me. "And you need to make the mission. That's the job. But you still have to weigh that against putting these people in uniform. Would you want them in a firefight next to you? Would you want them running an aid station for combat casualties? Sometimes the answer's no."

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Post-Vietnam, all the military branches have relied on a large stretch of the nation from Texas to Virginia to fill its ranks. Not coincidentally, this is the region where a majority of big military bases remain open. Anecdotally, most every single soldier in my 30-man scout platoon was from the South or Midwest, the lone exceptions being one Californian and one Haitian immigrant via Trenton. If what the staff sergeant recruiter's dealing with becomes a trend, and if that trend holds? Well, something's gonna have to give. Spoiler alert: It won't be Uncle Sam.

I was recently in Puerto Rico for a reporting assignment, and attended a ceremony for graduating high schoolers across the island who are joining the military. Their recruiters from the Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard (yes, Coasties, naysayers!) came to join the celebration, dressed to the nines in their dress uniforms.

Puerto Ricans overrepresent in uniform, per capita, compared to their mainland counterparts, and service is ingrained in the island's history—even before becoming an American territory, it was a military colony for Spain, after all. Between the pomp and presentation of certificates to the new recruits, I asked some of the recruiters about their work.

One told me their job's "regrettably" gotten a lot easier since Hurricane Maria, because of economic opportunity. A few said their main challenge isn't selling their branch like it is on the mainland, but finding kids whose English is good enough to pass the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), a multiple-choice exam required of all potential enlistees. Most said that unlike the recruiter in the South, the war in Afghanistan isn't much of a factor.

"If they want that experience, they go with us or Marines," an Army recruiter said. "If not, they go National Guard or Navy, and can stay close to home. We're on our own thing, though. I think it's much different [in the States]."

(On a completely unrelated note: It's so fucking bizarre young Puerto Ricans serve in the military and salute the American flag but it's not a state. Jesus Christ. I don't care that it's a corporate tax haven. Just make it a state already, for fuck's sake.)

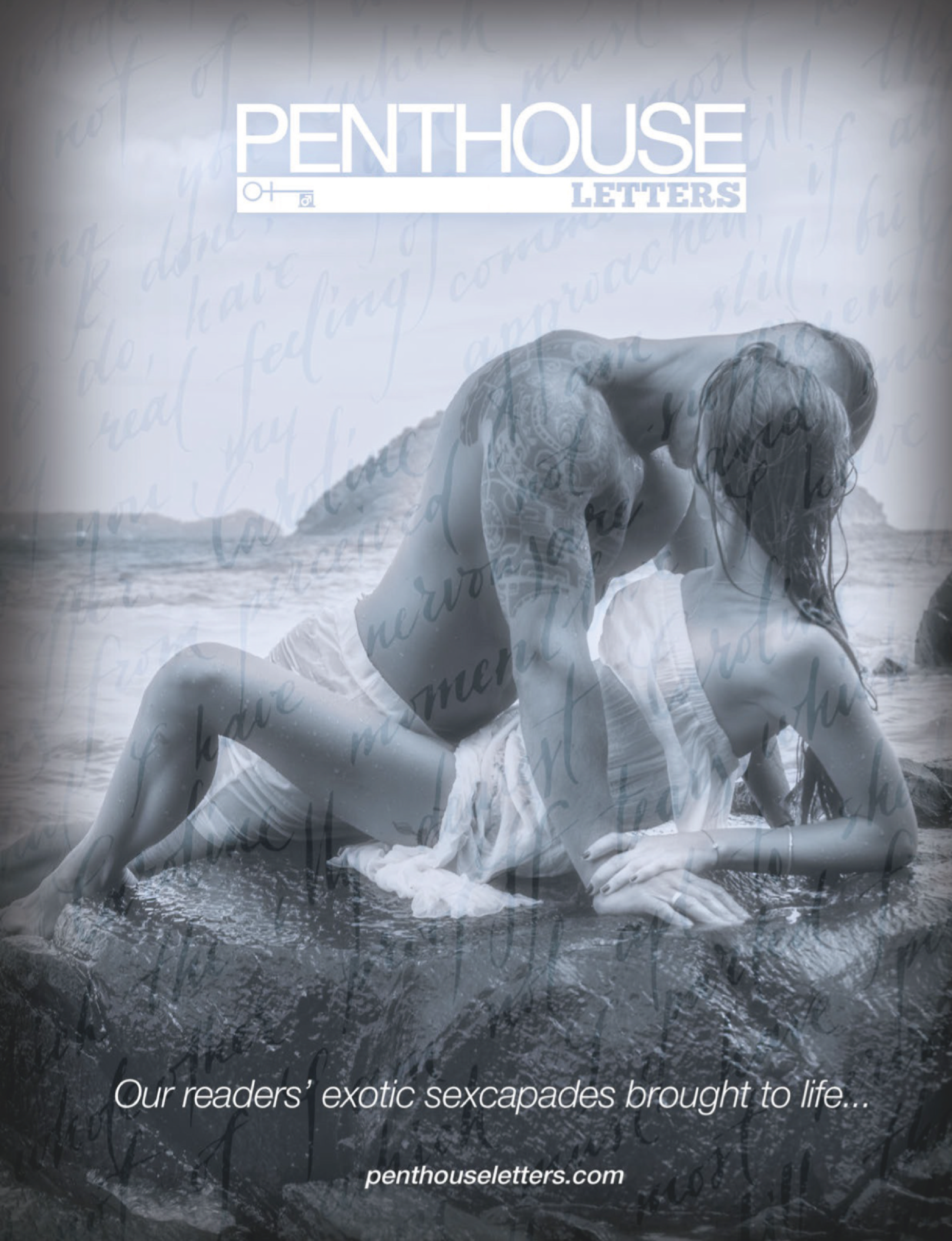
All this is why recruiters are now trying outreach into long-avoided liberal cities for new servicemembers. All this is why the head of Army Recruiting Command is trying out a "gap year" approach to bored college students looking to do something different. All this is why one of the Puerto Rican enlistees I talked to met his recruiter through an online videogame tournament—his recruiter's part of the Army's e-sports team (yes, it's a real thing, I couldn't believe it, either), and started talking up the benefits he's earned through service between game rounds.

I asked the recruit if that's what he wants to do someday in the Army, if he stays in long enough.

"Sure do," he said, with the easy shrug of adolescent swagger. "First I got to go to Afghanistan, though. I'm infantry."

Videogames to real combat to videogames again. Military recruiting in 2019 in a nutshell.

Matt Gallagher is a U.S. Army veteran of Iraq and the author of the novel "Youngblood" (Atria/Simon & Schuster).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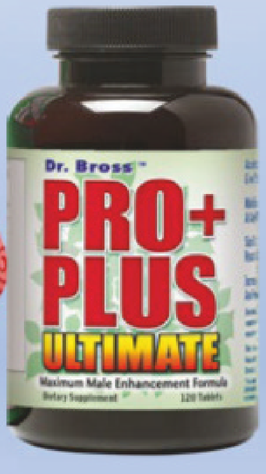
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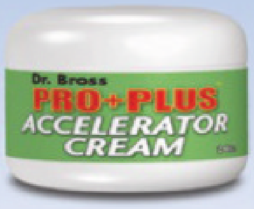
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